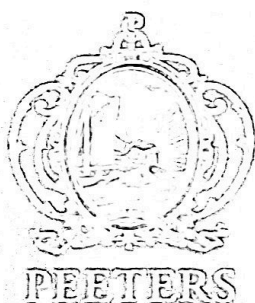


IS FAITH RATIONAL?

A HERMENEUTICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL
ACCOUNTING FOR FAITH

BY

WESSEL STOKER



Is faith rational? Some respond by providing proofs for God's existence. Others hold that no reasons for the Christian faith can be given. This book discusses different ways of accounting for faith, i.e. classical apologetics, the transcendental view that faith is part of human nature, and the view that argues for the rationality of faith on the basis of direct perceptions of God that appear to be objective. The author subsequently proposes a rational accounting for the Christian faith in our secularized and religiously pluralistic society. His starting point is the lasting religious experience of believers in everyday life. He also discusses the question of how this accounting for faith can function in a world of both secular worldviews and other religions.

Religious experience is not subjective or arbitrary but rational. In these experiences human beings are involved with God. Religious experience can be described phenomenologically as an experience that transcends our capacities. God reveals himself to people primarily in narratives. Narratives have a rational structure and the Gospel narratives provide, in narrative form, arguments for faith. The assent to faith involves the whole person and stamps his life story and conduct. Assent to faith is thus affective, but that does not exclude its being rational.

The positive reason for faith lies in experience itself. There are no reasons for faith outside the faith itself, but this does not mean that there are no points of contact in human existence for the Christian faith.

Prof. dr. Wessel Stoker teaches philosophy of religion and aesthetics at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. He is the author of *De christelijke godsdienst in de filosofie van de Verlichting* and *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?*

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WESSEL STOKER



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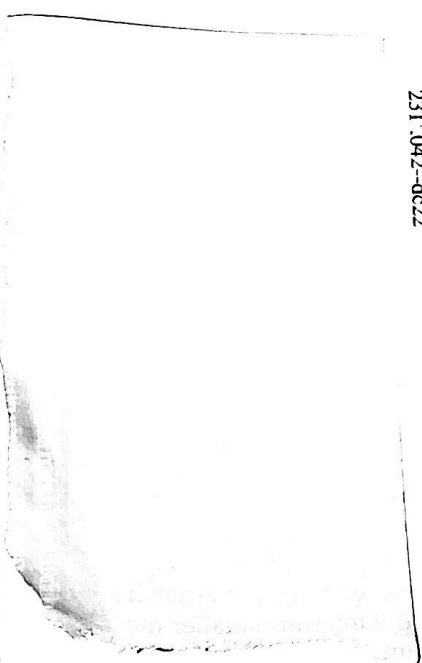
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form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, record-
ing, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in
writing from the publisher.

He that, in the ordinary affairs of life, would admit of nothing
but direct plain demonstration, would be sure of nothing
in this world, but of perishing quickly.

John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 4.11.10

For Beeuwke

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1. What is This Book About?	1
2. How Should We Understand Rationality and Religious Experience?	11
3. Outline of the Study	18

Part I: Two Ways of Accounting for Faith

1. RELIGION IS PART OF HUMAN NATURE (PAUL TILLICH)	23
1. Introduction	23
2. A Transcendental Accounting for Faith	25
2.1. Implicitly and Explicitly Religious Experiences	26
2.2. Mysticism as a Category	30
3. The Tension between Faith and History	37
4. A Dialogical Accounting for Faith	42
5. Concluding Remarks	44
2. THE OBJECTIVITY OF PERCEIVING GOD (WILLIAM P. ALSTON) ..	47
1. Introduction	47
2. Perceiving God	51
2.1. Perception as a Doxastic Practice	53
2.2. The Cumulative Argument	58
3. Experience: Conceptual or Not?	63
4. No Practice-Relative Rationality and Truth	70
5. Concluding Remarks	77

Part II: A Hermeneutical-Phenomenological Accounting for Faith

3. THE TESTIMONY TO TRANSCENDENCE	85
1. Introduction	85
2. The <i>Experience</i> of Religious Transcendence	91

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VIII

3. Testimony to Transcendence	102
4. Religious Experience: Trans-Intentional, Affective-Cognitive and Narrative	109
5. Religion and Rationality	114
5.1. A Worldview A Priori	115
5.2. The Trans-Intentional Aspect of Religious Experience	118
4. NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY	124
1. Introduction	124
2. Prefiguration: Life as a Story in the Making	126
3. Configuration	136
3.1. The Extra of the Literary Story: Narrated Time	136
3.2. The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Explanation	144
4. Refiguration: The Narrative Explanation and the Reader ..	154
5. Narrative and Rationality	160
5. AFFECTIVITY AND ASSENT TO A TESTIMONY	163
1. Introduction	163
2. Religious Emotion	166
3. Layered Affective (Religious) Experience	179
3.1. Layered Affectivity	180
3.2. The Layered Religious Affective Experience (Schleier- macher)	186
4. Affectivity and the Rationality of Assent	191
6. WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE?	201
1. Introduction	201
2. Contextualism and the Accounting for Faith	204
2.1. R.F. Thiemann's Theological Contextualism	204
2.2. Reasons for Commitment	209
2.3. Rationality that Goes Beyond the Practice	214
3. An Argument from Religious Experience	220
4. Accounting for Faith in a Pluralistic World	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY	249
INDEX OF SUBJECTS	261
INDEX OF NAMES	264

FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

This book is a translation of *Is geloven redelijk? Een geloofsverantwoording*. I profited a great deal from the discussions in the Netherlands on this book and on the basis of those discussions I have included some extra material in this English version.

This study defends a practice-oriented view of rationality which rejects both classical foundationalism and the view that practices or forms of life have only their own internal rationality. The latter position holds that this rationality cannot be applied to any other practice. Therefore, I have added a separate section on universal rationality (§6.2.3). This study provides an argument for faith that deals explicitly with possible refutations. In this version I have gone more deeply into those possible refutations (§6.3). I have also explained more completely my objections to an exclusivism that claims that the Christian faith alone possesses the complete truth, thereby automatically excluding other forms of faith (§6.4).

In this book I make use of lectures and preliminary studies that have been published elsewhere. In June 2001 I gave a lecture for the Dutch Society for the Philosophy of Religion called 'Religious Experience and the Accounting for Faith: Rationality as a Life Category.' This lecture, from which this present book grew, was published in the *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* (2002/3) with extensive commentary by Gijsbert van den Brink and a reply from me. At international Tillich symposia in Frankfurt I gave, among other things, two lectures that were a preparation for the chapter on Tillich's accounting for faith: 'Faith, Truth and History,' in G. Hummel (ed.), *Truth and History: A Dialogue with Paul Tillich* and 'The Mystical in Religious Experience: Tillich's Transcendental Theology of Experience,' in: G. Hummel and D. Lax (eds), *Mystisches Erbe in Tillichs philosophischer Theologie*. In November 2002 I gave a lecture for college teachers of religion on the rationality of the dialogue on worldviews published as 'Über die Art der Gesprächsführung zwischen Anhängern verschiedener Weltanschauungen,' in: P. Haigis and D. Lax (eds), *Brücken der Versöhnung*. For the UFSIA in Antwerp I lectured in February 2003 on layered affective experiences for researchers in the area of religion and emotion. In April 2003 I gave a lecture at the University of Pretoria for its faculty of theology on accounting for faith and rationality called 'De rationaliteit van de religieuze ervaring,' [The

Rationality of Religious Experience] in: *Verbum et Ecclesia* 2004. In November of that same year, at the conference 'Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology' hosted by the faculty of theology at the University of Louvain, I lectured on the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience ('The Rationality of Religious Experience', in: L. Boeve, Y. de Maeseneer, and S. van den Bossche (eds), *Religious Experience and Contemporary Theological Epistemology*). I also used my article on Jean-Luc Marion, 'God denken in de filosofie' [Thinking God in Philosophy], in: W. Stoker and H. van der Sar (eds), *Heroriëntatie in de theologie* [Reorientation in Theology].

I would like to express my thanks to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research for funding the translation of this work. I am also grateful to the publishers of the series Studies in Philosophical Theology for including this work. To Dr. Henry Jansen I would also like to express my great appreciation for the care he exercised in his translation.

Wessel Stoker,
Amsterdam, January 2006

INTRODUCTION

1. What is This Book About?

Two Challenges

Gauguin's painting 'The Vision After the Sermon' depicts the religious experience of some Breton women. They have just heard a sermon on Jacob's wrestling with a man at the river Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-32). Listening to the sermon can make them receptive later to an experience with God similar to Jacob's or it can influence their daily religious experience more indirectly. The tree in the painting clearly distinguishes the space allotted to the women from the space allotted to the scene of Jacob's wrestling. Does Gauguin intend to indicate by this means that the former is real and the latter imaginary? He, apparently, was impressed by the seriousness of the faith of these women, but in a letter to Vincent van Gogh he referred to their superstitiousness. Is their faith superstition and therefore an illusion? Or can one account rationally for the faith or religious experience of the women and the priest who is standing with them? From the beginning, Christians have found it necessary to account for their faith in response to changing circumstances. Because the place that the Christian faith occupies in Western society has changed immensely, the questions will arise anew as to why people believe. There are two challenges at the present time to which a contemporary accounting for faith should respond.

The place of faith in Western society has changed gradually since the second half of the previous century in at least two respects. On the one hand, Christianity lost its central position and became a *minority* faith. On the other hand, Western society has become pluralistic through the presence of other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and new religious movements.

With respect to the first development, there has been a shift from aggressive atheism to different forms of agnosticism, i.e. a taking leave of God, in particular the personal God of the Christian faith.¹ Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God expresses the feeling of many in our

¹ A. Houtepen, *God, een open vraag* [God, An Open Question], 53-81.

culture who reject the idea of a theistic, personal God and consider the philosophical foundation via proofs of God's existence or metaphysics to lack any credibility. At the same time they recognize, as Nietzsche did, that there are other possibilities with respect to religion or spirituality than monotheism. Religion and spirituality enjoy a certain popularity, but that does not obtain for the larger part of organized Christian religion.

The other and more recent development is that our society has become pluralistic because of divergent religious and secular beliefs. Claiming that one's own religion or worldview is exclusively true in the sense that they possess the whole truth will have disastrous consequences for society. Totalitarian claims conflict with a pluralistic and democratic society which demands that we consider our own views to be options among the many available. Rejecting this demand can lead to prejudice, discrimination, oppression or still worse violence, as was witnessed on September 11, 2001 in New York and on March 11, 2004 in Madrid. Religion can be very dangerous. Religious believers can be so fanatic about their beliefs that others are oppressed or destroyed. What Nietzsche writes about religious fanatics, the Inquisition and the heretics is once again of current import:

If all, who thought so highly of their beliefs... [and] did not spare honour, body and life in their service, used only half of their energy to investigate what right they had to cling to such beliefs and the ways in which they arrived at those beliefs — how peaceful the history of humankind would have been.²

In the current situation this statement by Nietzsche from 1878 indicates in a striking way the position of fundamentalists who refuse to give reasons for their faith to those of other faiths because they believe that they have the truth. They consider all discussion superfluous, thus refusing to recognize that we are all finite creatures with finite conceptions of religious transcendence.

A contemporary accounting for faith should, in my view, respond to both challenges. If the Christian faith is no longer simply an accepted part of our culture, those who (more or less) believe need to begin with their own experience if they are to answer the question of why they believe. The entire framework of the credibility of the Christian faith is under pressure today and therefore everything depends on *the believer's own experience*. However indispensable experience is for Christian faith, one can point to an insight present in the whole Christian tradition. Anselm already remarked: '... whoever has not believed will not experience and whoever

does not experience will not understand.'³ The systematic theologian G. Ebeling also points to the connection between faith and experience:

As long as Christian speaking does not have an experiential dimension and the Christian faith is not lived in such a way that our experience changes, there is indeed occasion to be worried as to whether theology is fulfilling its task of co-responsibility with respect to the experiential relationship between word and faith.⁴

The Christian faith is not primarily a doctrine or a morality but, above all, an experience that affects the human being in the totality of his being. Famous definitions of faith point to this: 'being grasped by that which unconditionally concerns us' (Tillich), 'feeling of absolute dependence' (Schleiermacher) or 'trust' (Pannenberg). These definitions of faith present faith not as a doctrine but as something that goes to the heart of our existence. Religious experiences are like lungs that inhale God's breath. For this same reason we should also point out that our use of the term faith refers to the dynamic quality of faith. We are not simply concerned with defending certain beliefs but also with the actual act of faith itself, the act of believing.

How can accounting for faith take up the second challenge, the pluralistic situation with respect to worldviews? Without dialogue and the mutual accounting for faith there is no possibility of a peaceful pluralistic society. Because religion can also lead to violence, we need to distinguish good religion from bad and violent religion. The question is not whether people have a religion but whether they have a religion that is beneficial. For this the mutual accounting for faith is necessary, whereby one's own faith can be critiqued by those of other faiths and worldviews. That was the reason why John Locke (1632-1704) already proposed that people account for their faith in the turbulent political situation caused by religious 'enthusiasts' in England at the time.

The End of Classical Foundationalism and Classical Apologetics?

Recent developments concerning accounting for faith also necessitate taking up this subject once more. These developments are, to a great extent, part of a changed view of rationality.⁵ The answer to the question of whether faith is rational depends a great deal on one's view of rationality.

³ F. Schleiermacher uses this as a motto in the second edition of his *The Christian Faith*.

⁴ G. Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube* III, 16.

⁵ For this development of the view of rationality see S. Toulmin, *Return to Reason*.

² Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, Vol. I, §630.

Until more than forty years ago *classical foundationalism* was generally widespread in philosophy. Classical foundationalism holds that the validity of what we believe depends on whether it is based on something that is itself fundamental and needs no further justification. Such fundamental propositions are propositions that are self-evident, such as 'no circle is square,' $1+5=6$, 'Red is a colour,' 'These are logical and mathematical propositions. Other fundamental propositions are direct, sensory observations, e.g., 'There is a car in front of me,' or uncontested reports of internal experiences, such as 'My foot hurts.' Fundamental propositions are those that cannot be falsified. To obtain as a foundation for our knowledge, a proposition needs to be incorrigible and undoubted.

These directly justified convictions are the foundations of our knowledge. Many of our propositions are, however, not foundational and not directly justified. To be rational they need therefore to be derived from foundational propositions. A conviction is rational if it can be converted into directly justified convictions. Because it is a formal procedure to convert non-foundational propositions into foundational propositions, this is called the *formal view of rationality* in distinction from a *practice-oriented view of rationality*.⁶

Because the formal view of rationality was dominant since Descartes until late in the twentieth century, one would expect that the accounting for faith also occurred in line with this view of rationality. That is partially true: *Classical apologetics* in the modern period goes back to John Locke who is known as a classical foundationalist.⁷

Locke does not doubt that the content of divine revelation is true, for God cannot deceive and cannot be deceived. He is the source of all knowledge. The existence of God is not a problem for him. In his view, that can be proven without a doubt. The problem is rather: How do we know if something is divinely revealed?⁸ Reason, according to this apologetic method, should prove that the Bible is God's revelation and does so by reference to the *miracles* that occurred at the time to which the Bible bears witness. It is, admittedly, a historical report for the later reader and is therefore never absolutely certain, but it does have a certain degree

⁶ For this distinction see M. Stenmark, *Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life*.

⁷ N. Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, XI v., XVII, nuancing this description with 'near-classical' foundationalist. Thomas Aquinas is also an example of a classical foundationalist (cf. A. Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief', 39-59).

⁸ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.16.14.

of probability. In Locke's view, if it appears from biblical investigation that the biblical reports about miracles are reliable, then the Bible has authority as a revelation from God. Miracles are dependent, after all, on God as Creator of nature. Locke acknowledges that the evidence provided by miracles is actually only a matter of probability, but he does not consider that objectionable. There are many things in life that do not claim absolute certainty. In this respect he is not a foundationalist in the sense that he wants to convert such non-foundational propositions into fundamental propositions. He does not, therefore, base the evidence of miracles as a non-directly justified proposition on a directly justified conviction. With respect to matters of 'opinion,' for Locke one can accept something in good faith, depending on the kind of arguments presented. Assent must be proportionate to the degree of probability the evidence entails. God has equipped us with cognitive abilities to the extent that we can get by in daily life.⁹

It will be no excuse to an idle and untoward servant, who would not attend his business by candle light, to plead that he had not broad sunshine. The Candle that is set up in us shines bright enough for all our purposes.¹⁰

In his view of knowledge Locke is a foundationalist. Our natural knowledge of God (and morality) fulfills, in his view, the requirement of 'indisputability.' As an example I will look at his anthropological proof of God's existence, which he claims rests on indisputable knowledge.

The starting point is human existence. Every human is intuitively certain of his existence. With a reference to Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* he writes: 'If I doubt of all other things, that very doubt makes me perceive my own existence, and will not suffer me to doubt of that.'¹¹ Further, he accepts that everything that has a beginning must also have a cause, for a non-entity cannot produce any real being.¹² On the basis of both theses — I am intuitively certain that I actually exist and everything that has a beginning must have a cause — he concludes that there has been 'something' from eternity. He adds: 'what was not from eternity had a beginning and what had a beginning must be produced by something else.'¹³

⁹ Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction I, 29f. For my interpretation of Locke see my *De christelijke godsdienst in de filosofie van de Verlichting* (The Christian Religion in Enlightenment Philosophy), ch. 1.

¹⁰ Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction, 30.

¹¹ Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.9.3.

¹² Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.10.3.

¹³ Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.10.3.

In the next step of the proof Locke indicates that a cause must possess at least as much perfection as its effect. And that effect here is the human being. Thus his conclusion is that something that is from eternity is not only 'most powerful' but also, as the first cause of the human being, 'most knowing.' He thus believes that he has shown, as a certain and evident truth 'that there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing Being.'¹⁴

I have critiqued this argument elsewhere.¹⁵ I am concerned here only with showing how Locke arrives at his fundamental proposition concerning the existence of God. In God the chain of cause and effect is broken and one ends up at a truth that does not need any further justification. In this way Locke believes that he has, with respect to religion, arrived at a directly justified proposition.

This classical apologetic method considers reason and faith to be two areas which are referred to as the lower and upper levels. The area of reason is universally accessible. It is the area of natural theology, which by means of reason provides proofs for the existence of God, as Locke has shown. These natural truths about God are considered to be the basis for the higher level that consists of the specific Christian faith with its supernatural truths such as Jesus as the Son of God or the trine God. To access this upper level of special revelation one needs identification papers, which are supplied by the evidence provided by the miracles or the evidence of the Old Testament prophecies having been fulfilled in Christ.

During the Enlightenment classical apologetics was gradually undermined. The two pillars of this method, the evidence of miracles and the proofs of God's existence, collapsed for the most part. Hume subjected the former to heavy criticism and disputed the possibility of belief in miracles. The historical criticism of the deists placed the trustworthiness of the Scriptures in question and thus also the biblical reports of the miracles. The historical proof on the basis of the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies also came under criticism and this discussion reached its climax with Lessing's famous assertion that historical truths can never function as proofs for the truth of religion. The foundation of classical apologetics, the proofs of God's existence, also lost their luster through Kant's criticism of natural theology: the existence of God cannot be

proven by the understanding; our knowledge is finite and does not reach to God. Thus both pivots of the classical accounting for faith had broken down already at the end of the eighteenth century. However, the proofs of God's existence are still the subject of much discussion, despite Kant's criticism of natural theology. Therefore I will say something more about these proofs in connection with the accounting for faith.

Proofs of God's existence are still being devised, including proofs on the basis of religious experience.¹⁶ If people, as K.E. Yandell argues,¹⁷ have an experience of God that passes certain tests, then there is, according to him, proof on the basis of experience that God exists (experiential evidence). Arguments constructed on the foundation of religious experience, viewed as proofs of God's existence are presented also by C.D. Broad, R. Swinburne, and G. Gutting. I will not refer to them further in this book as such but will make the following remarks about them here in connection with accounting for faith.

In discussions about the proofs of God's existence proponents and opponents seem to balance each other. The proofs of God's existence are not convincing for everyone and secular critics are just as unable to demonstrate beyond a doubt that theism is incoherent. Already in the 1970s this situation was reason enough to lead B. Mitchell to abandon the proofs of God's existence as the starting point for his accounting for faith.¹⁸

There is a difference between the *logical validity* of an argument and its *cogency* to invoke assent. If one limits oneself in accounting for faith to the proofs of God's existence, the impression arises that accounting for faith is simply a matter of logical argument. Accepting an argument is something other than a faith conviction. Faith has to do with one's *ultimate concern* and affects the whole person. Affectivity also plays a role in this. An important aspect of accounting for faith is how affectivity, how mood and emotion, are related to the rational aspect of assent to the Christian faith. This question is hardly or not at all discussed in the literature on accounting for faith. For example, J.H. Newman takes up this aspect in his *Grammar of Assent* in how faith arises.

¹⁶ C.D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy, and Philosophical Research*; R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, ch. 13; G. Gutting, *Religious Beliefs and Religious Skepticism*; C. Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*; K.E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*.

¹⁷ Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, ch. 12.

¹⁸ B. Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief*.

¹⁴ Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.10.6; 4.10.10.

¹⁵ Stoker, *De christelijke godsdienst*, 11f.

In epistemology the question is also discussed as to whether a conviction becomes rational only when arguments for it have been formulated, as in the case of the proofs of God's existence in natural theology. A. Plantinga disputes this and argues that belief in God is actually fundamental and that therefore no reasons for belief in the existence of God need be given. It is rational to have such a conviction without first giving reasons for it.¹⁹

A theological objection, finally, to classical apologetics as such is the intellectualistic view of the biblical revelation as a set of suprarational truths. In my view, intellectualism has no part in religious faith.

Classical apologetics and, more generally, an accounting for faith on the basis of the proofs of God's existence have lost their credibility. But so has the *formal view of rationality in classical foundationalism*, i.e. the view that non-fundamental propositions have to be converted into fundamental propositions. Plantinga points out that classical foundationalism cannot be true. Propositions that are generally viewed as reasonable cannot, according to classical foundationalism, be rational. Self-evident propositions such as 'The world has a history of longer than a year' or 'There are people other than myself' or 'A material world exists' could not be rational. They cannot pass the test of justification that classical foundationalism sets. No one has ever presented arguments for them that are fundamental (self-evident or incorrigible) or that can be converted into propositions that are.²⁰ Nevertheless, we see such propositions as rational. The requirements made by classical foundationalism for rationality go contrary to what we usually, without any difficulty, see as rational.

Is classical foundationalism itself rational according to its own criterion for rationality? Its criterion for justification itself does not fulfill the requirement set by classical foundationalism, namely, the requirement of (conversion into) propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible. Classical foundationalism is thus itself not rational, according to its own criterion.²¹

The claim that there is one type of rationality that is universally valid has proved to be untenable, both for the natural sciences as well as for the humanities. This formal view of rationality found in classical founda-

¹⁹ A. Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief', 16-93.

²⁰ A. Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief', 59f. B. Cusveller in *De kenteorie van Alvin Plantinga* (R. van Woudenberg, B. Cusveller, eds), 39.

²¹ Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief', 75f. For W. P. Alston's critique see below, ch. 2.2.1, and for Wittgenstein's critique, ch. 2.4. See also H.I. Brown, *Rationality*, ch. 2.

dationalism has been abandoned in the philosophy of science under the influence of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

What the changed view of rationality means for the accounting for faith we will see further in this study. For the moment, I will point to one aspect here. We now admit the presence of rationality in areas where, according to the criterion of rationality in classical foundationalism, it was previously unthinkable to do so: narrated history and experience have their own rationality. That is of great importance for faith. Reason is no longer viewed as something over against and above experience, as something to which experience is accountable, as was the case in classical apologetics. Individual and temporal experience has its own creative meaning, according to T. de Boer. The reality that we perceive is more than an illustration of the concept provided by rational thinking: 'It is not so that we already understand reality through thinking and use experience as a suitable illustration.'²² In my accounting for faith I choose the way of experience and will show the rationality of that way.

The Question

With Gauguin's painting in mind, the question with which this study is concerned can be formulated as follows: How can one account for the faith of the Breton women and of the priest? The road of classical apologetics with its recourse to miracles and the proofs of God's existence is closed. In formulating a contemporary accounting for faith one needs to deal with the challenge that faces the (Christian) believer now, belonging as he does to a minority in a society in which faith is no longer self-evident. Everything depends on one's own experience. *The experience of the believer should therefore be the starting point for the accounting for faith.* The other challenge is to live as a (Christian) believer in a society in which different worldviews abound. Any accounting for faith should therefore be open for critical dialogue with other religions and secular worldviews that are part of contemporary society. The question this study seeks to answer therefore is: *How can one account for faith in such a way that the experience of the believer is central and the challenge of pluralism in today's world is answered?*

My answer to this question will be a hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith. This approach does not start with theological propositions about the faith but with the experience of the believer. That

²² T. de Boer, 'De vier zuilen van de filosofie' [The Four Pillars of Philosophy], 9.

is why the term 'phenomenology' is used: it literally means the study of phenomena. I will begin with the phenomenon that there are believers in society who claim to experience God's salvation in Jesus Christ. I am therefore not using phenomenology in the classical sense, i.e. Husserl's use of the term. Nor am I using it in the sense in which classical phenomenology of religion uses it, i.e., G. van der Leeuw and M. Eliade, who wanted to describe the structure of religious phenomena across the different religions. Rather, I am using the term as it used by phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Ricoeur and others, who describe the world in which people live. Experience is hermeneutical in nature, the result and taking up of the effective history of the community of faith in its dialogue with the Bible and tradition. That is why I view phenomenology as hermeneutical phenomenology.

In connection with the second challenge, living in a pluralistic society, one should note that this study is deliberately limited. Accounting for faith and interreligious dialogue go hand in hand, because in dialogue one does, after all, give an account for one's own faith. The dialogue with Buddhists, for example, demonstrates that they have insights on rationality that are different from those in the West. I will confine myself to the discussion on rationality in Western philosophy and theology insofar as this is important for accounting for faith. I will therefore only show the consequences for dialogue with other religions and secular worldviews that the accounting for faith presented by this book entails (ch. 6.4). Interreligious dialogue and the problem of pluralism require a separate study.

One should distinguish between *positive* and *negative* apologetics. The former shows that there are reasons for faith or indicates that the structure of faith is itself reasonable. The latter is concerned primarily with reasons against or objections to faith. One can encounter objections based on science, such as the view that, according to scientific insight, human beings and the world are products of chance. This contradicts the view that humans and the world are designed by and referred to God as creator. Another objection could be that the existence of God cannot be proven and therefore faith in God is irrational. This study belongs to the genre of positive apologetics: I will show that reasons can be given for one's commitment to Christian faith.

There have been, of course, other accountings for faith with religious experience as their starting point. First, there are those accountings that intend to show that *faith belongs to human nature*. This is what a transcendental accounting for faith attempts. Such an accounting begins with the experience of the believer and inquires into the possibility of this

experience. It investigates the conditions of experience and thus attempts to indicate that all human experience has a religious dimension. Explicitly or implicitly, experience refers, it is claimed, to God. We can find such transcendental accountings for faith on the basis of experience in Catholic theologians such as Rahner and Oberhammer and in Protestant theologians such as Schleiermacher, Tillich and in a philosopher like Schaeffler.

The American philosopher W.P. Alston takes another approach, analysing the testimonies of 'perceptions of God' and showing that they are objective. Because such perceptions of God are reliable, the believer is justified epistemologically on the basis of his experience to make certain statements about God. Before I present my way of accounting for faith, I will discuss both of the above types and evaluate them. The reader may judge which of these three ways of accounting for faith discussed in this study appeals to or convinces him or her.

This study has been written from the perspective of systematic theology. The accounting for faith is presented not from the viewpoint of dogmatics but rather that of philosophy of religion, viewed as a theological discipline. I see philosophy of religion here as a reflection on religious experience on the basis of hermeneutic phenomenology, in which the meaning, rationality and truth of religious experience is investigated. Before I present the outline of this study, I will define two concepts that are central to it: rationality and religious experience.

2. How Should We Understand Rationality and Religious Experience?

Rationality

We use the words 'reasonableness' and 'rationality'. Is there a difference in meaning between these two terms? In distinction from understanding, reasonableness can have a moral hue. According to several English dictionaries (Oxford, Chamber's, Random House, Webster's), reasonableness means, in addition to 'in accordance with reason', 'fair or just treatment'. According to the same dictionaries, rationality means 'being rational' and the term rational means 'of the reason', 'judicious'. I will use the terms reasonable and rational interchangeably.

We should not limit rationality to being consistent with logic or to the efficiency of the economist in the sense of reaching goals in a rational way. Neither should rationality be limited to science. It has to do with

everyday life as well, with religion and worldviews. Rationality or reasonableness concerns, according to Van Huyssteen, our responsibility to strive after clarity, intelligibility and optimal understanding as means for coping with the world and ourselves.²³

Rationality has to do with our convictions, our actions and our values.²⁴ What claim or conviction is rational? A claim is, for example, the statement: 'It is impossible to believe in God.' Human acts also fall under rationality: What acts are reasonable? Are Christian acts rational? These are questions that can be asked. The values that we have are also subject to rationality: To which values can one reasonably give priority? Is it reasonable to prefer the value of self-sacrifice or that of self-interest? Rationality is viewed in this way as a normative concept. We are obligated as human beings to use our abilities in a way that accords with reasonableness.

In the previous section I pointed to the bankruptcy of the view of rationality in classical foundationalism. That does not mean, however, that it no longer functions in our contemporary world. We will see an example of this in the first chapter.

Primarily because of Kuhn, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, many — and that is also the case in this study — now use a *practice-oriented rationality*. Rationality is dependent on a certain practice, a normative framework that sets its own rules for what is reasonable or unreasonable. There are differing opinions, however, as to the extent to which rationality is not only *dependent* on a certain practice but also *determined* by it, as many — primarily postmodern — philosophers argue, following Wittgenstein. In the latter case one could speak of the rationality of one's convictions only within one's own circle. As a result, the different practices would lead to many different rationalities. For the accountability of faith this would entail fideism or relativism. One would hold one's own faith to be rational and true but could not make a case for that to those of other faiths or worldviews.

If one holds with fideism that faith cannot be accounted for publicly and that the rationality of faith is only something for one's own group, then a critical dialogue about one another's convictions, values and conduct is scarcely possible. It would be difficult to discuss what defines good and bad religion. The question of whether rationality is limited to one's own circle will be discussed later. In this Introduction I will limit myself to the practice-oriented view of rationality and to describing

rationality as a normative concept that has to do with our convictions, our actions and our values. I will discuss this more precisely below (chs. 2, 4, 2.5 and 3.1). The question of the reasonableness of the Christian faith concerns, as we will see, not only its clarity, intelligibility and optimal understanding but also the reasons for faith. The positive reasons for faith lie in experience.

Showing that faith is reasonable does not mean that we are attempting to do what Enlightenment philosophers attempted, i.e. to derive faith from reason. Contrary to John Toland in his *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), I hold that the Christian faith is fundamentally mysterious. Religious Transcendence is not an extension of our horizons and differs from a transcendence that always remains within a finitude extended to infinity.

Religious Experience

Religious experience is not something that exists apart from all else. It is determined by what belongs to the religion in question. In this study we are concerned with accounting for the Christian faith. Therefore we need to say something about the relation between *experience* on the one hand and *faith and revelation* on the other. We will first discuss religious experience in distinction from other experiences.

Experience is the most general term for the process of our journey of discovery with respect to reality. Science, technology, economy, religion, morality, art, work, recreation and daily intercourse with people are not closed systems, but different dimensions of an integral experience of people. How ambiguous the term experience is is apparent from how these experiences differ from one another. Religious and aesthetic experiences differ to a great extent from scientific experience. We will now look at experience understood as the development of a fixed pattern of behaviour, a disposition.

The experiences that one undergoes generally at work and in daily life have to do with a skill that has been acquired on the basis of observation and practice. The word 'empirical' (from the Greek *empeiria*) has to do with the skills a person has acquired: a being-practised in and familiarity with. Aristotle points to experience as a process: 'from memory skill comes forth in a human being; only many memories of one and the same thing give the ability of an experience.'²⁵ We speak thus of the *professional experience* of people. Religious experience is something entirely

²³ J.W. van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality*, 2.

²⁴ N. Rescher, *Rationality*, 2.9.

²⁵ Quoted by F. Kambartel, 'Erfahrung', in: *HWP/II*, 609.

different from professional experience but is like it in one respect. People can also become practised in faith through developing the right disposition. Experience in the religious sense can be practised by participation in liturgy or by exercises set up by schools of spirituality.²⁶

Scientific experience is directed at experiment. Experience here indicates that which can be empirically observed and established. In Francis Bacon (1561-1621) experience no longer refers to the possession of human beings but to the process and method which leads to the possession of this. The meaning shifts from the Greek *empeiria* focussed on human capacities to the Latin *experiri* (to investigate, research).²⁷ Through experiment objectivity and intersubjectivity — the requirement that different researchers agree with the results — are indispensable for experience. *Aesthetic experience* differs from scientific experience. A painting is not simply there, in front of me, present before me, but can be profoundly experienced. The work of art makes an appeal to me and addresses me in my whole being. It touches me emotionally, in my affectivity. Many forms of art broaden daily experience through an 'iconographic increase.' Works of art summon up a image of reality that goes beyond what daily or scientific experience gives. In speaking of imagination we should think not only of visual perception but also of language. Poetry and stories create a world; music captures human emotions sometimes more deeply than words can. In contrast to scientific experience, aesthetic experience is difficult to repeat in an experiment.

Like aesthetic experience, *religious experience* has just as little to do with the scientific theoretical presentation of an object by a subject. According to the Christian faith, religious experience is determined by the confrontation with God who reveals himself. If one responds to this revelation and becomes involved with (religious) Transcendence, a relationship of trust arises and there is what can be called an experience of faith.²⁸ I will use the terms 'God' and 'Transcendence' interchangeably.

Religious experience thus affects the whole person, in her heart, feelings, insights and conduct. In religion an answer is given to the question of what the person is fundamentally and how he finds his purpose. Religion thus affects the person's identity. Liturgy gives a good indication of how much a person is addressed in his entirety. According to E.H. van

Olst, the history of temple, synagogue and church shows that clearly. He writes about the church:

in the celebration, remembering the great acts in which God revealed himself, the past is made present, it concerns what God has done and will do for us in Jesus Christ. Such a celebration is not an intellectual assertion of certain facts but an experience of God's nearness.²⁹

In this study I am concerned with accounting for the experience of (more or less) believers. We will see that religious experience essentially entails involvement with religious Transcendence. For the moment I will define religious experience as *involvement of the whole person with Transcendence*. In the course of this study I will elaborate on this working definition further (ch. 3.4).

How is experience related to faith? I define faith formally and materially. With Tillich, I view faith *formally* as 'the state of being ultimately concerned'.³⁰ This indicates that faith has both a subjective as well as an objective element. It concerns the whole person (being grasped) and is connected with something that concerns us unconditionally. This is called respectively the *fides qua* (the attitude of faith) and the *fides quae* (the content of faith). That distinction is incorrect in as far as it suggests that one can detach the subject pole from the object pole. Descartes attempted that in epistemology, but the attempt was proved by Husserl's phenomenology to be untenable. Subject and object interact with each other and this is true also for religious experience. The attitude of faith and the content of faith are inseparably bound to each other, as Tillich's definition of faith, 'being grasped by that which transcends us unconditionally,' expresses superbly.

This formal definition of faith is, however, too broad and can also be used for secular faith in general: that which concerns the humanist unconditionally is the human being and that which concerns the nationalist unconditionally is the nation. Because we are dealing with the Christian faith here, I will supplement this formal definition by defining faith materially as the *testimony to Transcendence or to God*, whereby the status of the believer is that of witness.

When we talk in this study about accounting for faith from religious experience, this formal and material concept of faith is presupposed. Religious experience entails, in this study, the experiential side of the Christian faith, which is always the interweaving of an objective

²⁶ K. Waayman, *Spiritualiteit*, Part 1, ch. 2.

²⁷ F. Maas, *God mee-maken in mensentaal* [Experiencing God in Human Language], 2. That is what the Hebrew word *emuna* points to: trusting in the Other, a community of life or, better, a personal communion with God (E.H. van Olst, *Bijbel en liturgie*, 105).

²⁹ E.H. van Olst, *Bijbel and liturgie*, 98.

³⁰ P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (1957), Main Works (MW) 5, 231.

element (that which concerns us unconditionally: Transcendence) and a subjective element (being grasped: testimony). In short, in this accounting for faith religious experience is focussed on the Christian faith experience.

Religious experience exists in the plural. Smart holds that there are two main poles of religious experience.³¹ The first is the experience of the holy, the experience of the numinous as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. God is experienced as a terrifying mystery and at the same time as something that draws us by his love and mercy. Moses' experience with the burning bush is an example of this. This pole emphasizes experiences in religions where God is (supra)personal. The other main pole is the contemplative or mystical experience that does not accept an 'opposite' to the Other. Mysticism emphasizes the experience of unity. Both poles are accompanied by their own set of feelings. The numinous experience reflects and engenders feelings of fear, reverence and humility and the contemplative experience feelings of serenity, trust, calm and happiness.³²

Hick makes a similar distinction.³³ He outlines a spectrum of religious experiences. At the one end our attention is directed straight at the material environment, which we experience not only in terms of physical concepts but also on another level in terms of religious concepts. Thus, an object (icon, temple, bread and wine, an event like the Exodus or a personal situation) is experienced as a mediation of the divine presence to us. At the other end of the spectrum the divine presence is experienced independently of the physical environment in forms provided by mysticism. Between these extremes are forms of religious experience that are mixed to different degrees. For most believers religious experience lies between the two extremes. Therefore I will make yet another distinction that is of great significance for this study.

Religious experience is often limited to a sudden, very special experience. That is incorrect. Religious experience is broader. Gauguin's painting, 'The Vision after the Sermon,' depicts two types of experiences: the *direct, momentary experience* and the *non-direct, lasting experience*. The Breton women have just listened to the story of Jacob's wrestling with

³¹ N. Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, ch. 4.

³² I will leave further nuances aside. Zaehner speaks of an experience that lies outside the cosmos. In this 'panentheic' experience in which one feels absolutely one with seen as an internal experience (Smart, *Dimensions*, 170).

³³ J. Hick, *Disputed Questions*, 21.

an unknown man. This sermon can make them receptive later on for a *direct experience with God* such as that of Jacob or it can influence their *lasting religious experience indirectly*.

Religious experience is often seen only as striking direct momentary experiences such as Jacob's, charismatic, mystical experiences or conversion experiences. William James deals exclusively with this type in his famous work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. That is not inappropriate — after all, the initial witnesses to Transcendence such as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Maria, Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Paul and many more had such momentary experiences. It is, however, one-sided to stress only those experiences. The title of Nicholas Lash's book *Easter in Ordinary* indicates that the central event of the Christian faith, Easter, is experienced by many believers in ordinary, inconspicuous, lasting events. Next to the direct, momentary experience there is also the *non-direct, lasting experience, experience as a process*, such as that of Naomi and Ruth in the book Ruth and of countless others after them.

The direct momentary experience is characterized by an immediate experience that can continue to affect one's life and thus influence the lasting experience. The lasting experience is characterized by a process that one undergoes. It is in this sense that Hegel and Gadamer speak about experience. Aristotle demonstrates that by means of the following image. He compares the many perceptions someone has with an army on the run, disappearing into the countryside. Perceptions can also dissipate. But if a perception is confirmed by repeated experience, then it sticks. He cites as an illustration the soldier who decides to make a stand. If other soldiers follow his example, then the whole army may stop fleeing. With this Aristotle wants to show how scientific experience arises, that is, experience that is universal in character and not dependent on chance observations. The army stops and can submit itself once again to the command of the general (reason). Gadamer explains the example differently, as a demonstration of how (daily) experience arises as a process of which no one is master. It is not one or another experience that is decisive, but everything arranges itself into a whole in a way that remains incomprehensible. One soldier suddenly stands still, and then some others and then yet others, and so on. It cannot be predicted, but neither it entirely unexpected.³⁴

The image also clarifies how lasting religious experience can arise for many. Hick also points to religious experience as lasting experience, as

³⁴ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 315ff.

a process in which a fixed pattern of behaviour is developed in order to interpret the world religiously. The lasting experience is also an encounter with God. The encounter with the living God arises because the world in that way as religious. Experiences of the world as creation, experiences of being addressed in our conscience with respect to responsibility regarding history as hope for the future despite the facts, experiences regarding matters of injustice are examples of lasting religious experiences. Zen meditation can, according to some, function in Christian spirituality as such an exercise.³⁵

Direct, momentary and non-direct, lasting experiences do not exclude each other and are often closely connected. Some people have a conversion experience which becomes deepened into a process of lasting experience or a religious lifestyle. Charismatic experiences, for example, can also continue to influence such a lifestyle or a direct experience with God can influence a lasting experience. Conversely, such a process of lasting experience can lead to a direct experience of God. In Alston, the concern is, as we will see, primarily the direct experience with God. In my accounting for faith, the accent will lie on the lasting form of religious experience, the experience with God mediated by the Bible, tradition and the community of faith.

3. Outline of the Study

The basic structure of this study is as follows:

In the *first part* (chs 1 and 2) we will look at two types of accounting for faith: the view that religion belongs to human nature (the transcendental approach) and the view that considers a perception of God to be objective (the epistemological analysis of the observation). Both take religious experience as their starting point. In the *second part* (chs 3-6) I will present my hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith as presented by Tillich, who wants to show that faith belongs to human

nature. Tillich views religious experience primarily as a lasting experience. It is as broad as experience can be. His position appears to have been influenced implicitly by the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism. Accounting for faith depends here fundamentally on showing a transcendental religious element in the experience that is undisputed.

In *chapter 2* we will see how the American analytical philosopher Alston gives an epistemological analysis of a direct perception of God. He employs a practise-oriented rationality and wants to avoid relativism and fideism. This accounting for faith consists in providing a cumulative argument with an objective religious observation at its core.

In the *second part* I will give a hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith, which takes, as its starting point, religious experience viewed as a hermeneutical, lasting experience.

In *chapter 3* the Christian faith will be characterized as the testimony to religious Transcendence and three aspects of religious experience will be indicated: the trans-intentional, the narrative and the affective aspects. The rationality of these will be indicated. The third chapter deals with the first aspect and chapters four and five with the second and the third, respectively. I will provide a phenomenological description of the trans-intentional aspect: an experience can be trans-intentional, i.e. it transcends the concern with people and things and thus refers to religious Transcendence.

In *chapter 4* the object pole of faith, the content of faith, is further investigated with respect to its rationality. The content of the Christian faith is primarily narrative in nature and has the form of a story. Human identity also has a narrative form. We will see, by means of the gospel of Mark, how this narrative recasts human life. The rationality of the biblical story lies in the giving of a narrative explanation for the belief that Jesus is the risen, living Son of God.

In *chapter 5* the subject pole of faith, the way in which the believer accepts the testimony to Transcendence, is our topic. Faith concerns the whole person, not only his insight and actions but also his affectivity. Faith knowledge is affective knowledge. We pose the question as to how affectivity is involved in assent to faith without ignoring in any way the rational side of that assent. Accepting the testimony to Transcendence is a matter of affective affirmation which is subject to rational discussion.

In *chapter 6* it is demonstrated why it is rational to believe. Contrary to fideism, I will not limit myself to demonstrating the internal rationality of the Christian faith, as post-liberal theologians like R.F. The-

³⁵ J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 113-15; J. Hick, 'Religious Faith as Experiencing-as', 288.

³⁶ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*; H.M. Enomiya-Lasalle, *Zen en Christelijke Spiritualiteit* [Zen and Christian Spirituality].

mann do. One can give reasons for his or her commitment, but they are not neutral reasons. There is a general rationality, by means of which worldviews and religions are subject to discussion in the public sphere. For the Christian believer, religious experience is a source of the reason to believe. On the basis of the previous three chapters we develop an argument from religious experience following the model of argumentation given by S. Toulmin. I will also indicate how this accounting for faith can function in a pluralistic society.

PART I

Two Ways of Accounting for Faith

1. RELIGION IS PART OF HUMAN NATURE

(PAUL TILLICH)

The unity of the *infinite* and the *finite* has become one of the fundamental principles of my doctrine of religious experience.
Tillich, MW 1, 414

Revelation is the manifestation of the ultimate ground and meaning of human existence (and implicitly of all existence). It is not a matter of objective knowledge, of empirical research or rational inference. It is a matter of ultimate concern; it grasps the total personality and is effective through a set of symbols.

Tillich, MW 4, 308

1. Introduction

In accounting for faith it is important to start with experience. Especially where Christian believers have become a minority and faith is no longer an obvious choice, experience has become even more crucial. In addition to the approach taken in this book, there are two other ways of accounting for faith that begin with the experience of the believer, each of which has its own emphases. The first way, which we will explore in this chapter, engages in a transcendental analysis of religious experience and holds that it lies within human nature to be religious. The second way, which we will discuss in the following chapter, consists of an epistemological analysis that shows that a direct experience of God is basically objective. Both ways of accounting for faith come, each in its own way, to the conclusion that there is an objective aspect to experience that refers directly to God.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Schleiermacher replaced classical apologetics with a transcendental one. The starting point was no longer historical evidence or the proofs of God's existence but religion as an actual given in society. Kant posed the transcendental question of how natural science, as actually carried out, was possible. In a similar way, this transcendental accounting for faith inquired into how religion, as it actually existed, was possible. It was along those lines that twentieth-century thinkers like Tillich, Rahner, Oberhammer and Schaeffler

developed their transcendental accounting for faith.¹ We will explore the heart of this way by looking at Paul Tillich's version of it.

The following elements are characteristic of a transcendental accounting for faith.

1. *Religion is part of human nature.* The human being is either implicitly or explicitly aware of God. He is an *anima naturaliter religiosa*.
2. If religion is part of human nature, then one should be able to discern that fact in human experience. *Religious experience is a core concept of this way of accounting for faith.*

3. *The perception of God is fundamental.* Instead of a philosophical proof of God's existence, a structural analysis of human beings and the world demonstrates an immediate orientation of the human being to the unconditional. This awareness of God is indicated by different terms: absolute dependence (Schleiermacher), an immediate awareness of the unconditional or God (Tillich), a supernatural existential (Rahner), or faith (Carroll Smith).

The theology of the German-American theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) is a theology of experience and inwardness.² It has become known as the theology to which the correlational method of question and answer is central. Because this theology attempts to show that human beings have existential questions which are answered by the Biblical message, it is a good example of an apologetic theology. For Tillich, apologetics, or accounting for faith, is not simply a separate locus. Rather, the whole of his theology is apologetic in that it starts with the human being and his situation and relates that to the Biblical message.³ What is less well known is that Tillich's theology is thus an example of a transcendental accounting for faith. It is this that we will explore below.

Tillich starts with experience. He asserts that reality as we know it reveals a break between experience and religion. This break is, in the first place, the result of human sin but is strengthened by the influence of what he sees as a wrong theology. Experience and religion had already parted company at the time of the Enlightenment. Much of the theology of the Enlightenment was inadequate, in his view, because it separated God from the world and God from the human being.⁴ God's transcendence, his

being 'above' the world, became emphasized at the expense of his immanence. The separation of the supernatural divine world from the human world is characteristic, according to Tillich, of supernaturalism in general.⁵ The consequence is, I would add, a *gulf between faith and experience*.

An important part of Tillich's accounting for faith is the attempt to bridge this gulf by means of experience. In this context Tillich stresses divine immanence, God's being 'in' our reality. He even holds that one can point to a constant religious element in all human experience, a sense of God or of the unconditional. What counts as religious experience is as broad as human experience itself.

This sense of God or of the unconditional is the foundation on which religion in general and the Christian faith in particular rest. That foundation is, in his view, self-evident. It thus meets the criteria of the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism which requires propositions to be incorrigible and self-evident (Introduction, §1). Tillich does not give any evidence for the claim that such a sense of God is present in experience. How does he argue that something like that is implicitly or explicitly present in every experience?

We will first look at the essence of this transcendental accounting for faith and define this constant a priori element in religious experience more narrowly as the mystical sense of the unity of the human being with God (§2). We will then explore more deeply the tension that we will gradually discover in this way of accounting for faith. Tillich appears to be influenced by classical foundationalism's view of rationality. We will investigate the extent to which that causes tension between the claims of faith and those of history (§3). In the concluding section (§5) we will inquire into the persuasiveness of this type of accounting for faith for contemporary society. We will also discuss how this way of accounting for faith deals with the challenges indicated in the Introduction (§4).

2. A Transcendental Accounting for Faith

The fundamental thesis of this type of accounting for faith is that religion is part of human nature. We should therefore view religion broadly as the experience of ultimate or absolute meaning. Such an experience is not

¹ For an analysis of the transcendental theory of religion in Rahner and Oberhammer see D. Berendsen, *Warom geloven mensen?* [Why do People Believe?], ch. 2.

² P. Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* 317 (HCT).

³ Tillich *Systematic Theology* I, 35 (ST) (the number after ST refers to the three volumes and not to the five parts of ST).

⁴ Tillich, HCT, 390.

⁵ See Tillich's Habilitationsschrift, *Der Begriff des Übernatürlichen, sein dialektischer Charakter und das Prinzip der Identität, dargestellt an der supranaturalistischen Theologie von Schleiermacher*, 42; ST II, 6.

only visible in organized or institutionalized religion but also in various daily experiences that are not explicitly religious. The term religion, for Tillich, refers not only to organized religion but also more generally to the concern with the ultimate that is part of all experiences. That is how culture acquires its soul. Belief, or faith, is not simply belief in God or gods but, more broadly, the 'ultimate concern' of a human being, her being grasped by that which concerns her unconditionally.⁶ Therefore, religious experience refers not only to those experiences that are *explicitly* so and found within organized religion, but also those that are *implicitly* religious. I will begin with the latter and show why Tillich holds that those experiences that are usually viewed as secular are in fact implicitly religious.

2.1. *Implicitly and Explicitly Religious Experiences*

1. Religious experience is a matter of life itself — so Tillich argues in his *The Courage to Be* (1952). The experience of Being-Itself is not something abstract but part of everyday human reality. Every person experiences, namely in his courage to exist, the Power of Being. In one way or another people are threatened by destruction, through some form of non-being, such as despair, loneliness, sickness or the approach of death. Precisely because of their participation in the Power of Being, people find the courage to live. For it is Being-Itself that has conquered non-being in itself. From that victory people draw the strength to face non-being in all its forms of fear, loneliness and doubt. The human being lives in an immediate connection with Being-Itself. He participates in it. Elsewhere Tillich calls this a mystical relation when he says that mysticism is participation.⁷

2. The daily cares and the struggle to survive can escalate to such an extent that we fall into a crisis of total despair, of doubt of all truth and meaning. In his theology Tillich pays a great deal of attention to such experiences. The reason behind this is that he has also deeply experienced the cultural crisis that was the result of two world wars. Even in situations of total despair we remain upright — because of our participation in Being. Being-Itself is, namely, Truth-Itself, which is confirmed

even when one denies it. Being-Itself is also absolute meaning, which is confirmed in the denial of all meaning. The skeptic, nihilist and blasphemer do not fall outside of God's reach. Tillich comes to this view through his entirely unique explanation of Luther's doctrine of justification:

Not only he who is in sin but also he who is in doubt is justified through faith. The situation of doubt, even of doubt about God, need not separate us from God. There is faith in every serious doubt, namely, the faith in the truth as such, even if the only truth we can express is our lack of truth.⁸

He speaks of this limit experience in *The Courage to Be* as a situation of *absolute faith*, faith that does not have any specific content, and of Being-Itself as the 'God above God,' referring here to Dionysius the Areopagite.⁹ Mystics also have the experience of no longer being able to make any positive statements about God. Of course, there is a difference between the situation described here and that of the mystic. The mystic arrives at this nameless contemplation of God as the ripe fruit of his encounter with God, whereas the radical skeptic experiences Being-Itself in an inexpressible sense of being surrounded by it, even when doubting all truth and meaning. Tillich would rather not speak of mysticism here but more generally of a breakthrough of the 'fundamental revelation' (*Grundoffenbarung*). What is revealed is 'the God of those who have no God, the truth of those who have no truth, the meaningfulness for those who have no meaning.'¹⁰ From these two examples it is apparent that the human being and Being-Itself are connected. In these experiences, however, we do not stumble onto the unconditional accidentally — rather, it is given with our being human, as we will also see in the next experience.

3. In intellectual culture and in art as well people encounter the ultimate dimension, which is here called 'the depth of reason.'¹¹ In our (scientific) knowledge we stumble, through partial truths, on to the truth itself. In the beauty of art beauty itself lights up. In the realization of justice something of justice itself is reflected. Giving form to the community through love points to love itself. We encounter here respectively truth, beauty, justice and love indirectly. The sacred is present in all of this but hidden in the profane. In all of these experiences there is therefore an *a priori* element, a constant and absolute element, that makes truth, beauty, justice or love possible.

⁸ 'The Protestant Era. Author's Introduction' (1948), MW 6, 290.

⁹ HCT 92.

¹⁰ 'Rechtfertigung und Zweifel' (1924), MW 6, 90.

¹¹ ST I, 88f.

⁶ *Dynamics of Faith* (DPF), MW 5, 256.

⁷ HCT 175; see also 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' MW 4, 291.

We can see that something religiously ultimate is present in daily experiences — even in those of despair and meaninglessness as well as in experiences of intellectual culture. That ultimate points to the unconditional that philosophical language terms the Power of Being, Being-Itself, or the depth of reason.

We have looked at examples of *implicitly* religious experiences, religion in the broad sense. We will now look at *explicitly* religious experiences in organized religion, in which, in a different way, this immediate sense of the unconditional is to be understood as a sense of God.

The human person can experience the sacred *explicitly* in two ways: as a gift and as a demand. The holiness of 'being' and of 'ought' are the elements of every religion. Where the accent falls is determined by the particular type of religion, i.e. an organized religion. If the holy is seen as a gift, one can then speak of a sacramental type, of which Roman Catholicism is an example. If the holy is seen primarily as 'the holiness of what ought to be,' then it concerns the prophetic-moral type, of which Protestantism is the prime example.¹²

The extent to which Tillich is a theologian of experience is apparent when he calls the *sacramental experience*, the experience of the presence of the holy, the most fundamental and universal religious experience. It is present in a hidden way in the abovementioned implicitly religious experiences.¹³ In organized religion this experience of the holy is concretized in a sacred place, time, person, book or something else. Bread and wine, the Easter candle — everything can be a bearer of the holy. Tillich calls this sacramental type of faith 'the "daily bread" of faith. Without which it becomes empty, abstract, and without significance for the life of the individuals and groups.'¹⁴ In addition to this basic sacramental element, Tillich sees the prophetic element as essential to religion as well. He considers it to be a critique of a possible degeneration of the sacramental. The prophetic is a protest against the denial of justice in the name of holiness.¹⁵ One should think here, for example, of the Nazi period.

¹² 'The Permanent Significance of the Catholic Church for Protestantism' (1941), MW 6, 236 (here Tillich calls the prophetic-moral type the eschatological type); DF, MW 5, 257. For the significance of Tillich with respect to nature and sacrament for eschatological theology see M. Brinkman, *Scheppling en sacrament*, 69-76 (Creation and Sacrament).

¹³ 'Die Kunst und das Unbedingte-Wirkliche,' GW 9, 360.

¹⁴ DF, MW 5, 258.

¹⁵ 'The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian' (1966), MW 6, 437.

In his Protestant dogmatics, *Systematic Theology*, the *prophetic-moral experience* receives all the attention.¹⁶ His Christology is concerned with the experience of the New Being that has appeared in Jesus as the Christ. This personal experience of faith emerges as being born again, justified and sanctified.¹⁷ In his doctrine of the Holy Spirit Tillich analyzes life in all its facets. He speaks here of the experience of the New Being as the experience of the presence of the Spirit in culture, morality and religion (in the narrow sense).¹⁸

For the sake of completeness, we should note that, although Tillich often speaks with respect to organized religion of the two types of experiencing the holy, the sacramental and the prophetic-moral experience, a third does emerge, i.e. the mystical experience reflected in the mystical traditions of the world religions. There are therefore not two but three types of religion: the sacramental, the prophetic-moral and the mystical.¹⁹

Tillich thus shows that religious experience is as broad as human experience itself. In this line he can then claim that 'Being religious is being unconditionally concerned, whether this concern expresses itself in secular or (in the narrower sense) religious forms.'²⁰ If Tillich is correct in calling the more generally secular experience *implicitly* religious, then this theology has something interesting to offer regarding the accounting for faith. A religious element is apparent in all aspects of life. Religion (in the broad sense) is thus part of human nature, even if a particular person is not religious in an explicit way.

What is it precisely that makes different experiences *religious* experiences? The answer to this lies in Tillich's general description of faith as *ultimate concern*. A religious experience is an experience that brings our 'ultimate concern' to expression. That is somewhat vague, for the ultimate can also be viewed wrongly — for example, by identifying the ultimate, the unconditional with something finite, something conditional that engrosses us completely.

The decisive feature that makes an experience religious is the immediate sense of the unconditional or of God in both the implicitly and

¹⁶ ST III, 47f., 100f., 167f., 289f.

¹⁷ ST II, 2, 203-08.

¹⁸ ST III, 235-51; chs. 28-29.

¹⁹ 'The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,' MW 6, 436f.; DF, MW 5, 258-61; 'The Permanent Significance of the Catholic Church for Protestantism,' MW 6, 240f.

²⁰ 'The Protestant Era. Author's Introduction,' MW 6, 291.

explicitly religious experiences. That is the constant *a priori* element of all experience. We will now see that this can be viewed as a mystical understanding, even though most people are not mystics.

2.2. *Mysticism as a Category*

Tillich begins his discussion of God with divine immanence. God 'dwells' in people and in the world. Tillich draws this insight from mysticism as a religious tradition. In his view, mysticism is the guiding principle for further specifying religious experience:

'Mystical' is ... a category which characterises the divine as being present in experience. In this sense, the mystical is the heart of every religion as religion Mysticism, or the 'felt presence of God' is a category essential to the nature of religion²¹

The term 'category' means 'a priori concept.' By viewing mysticism as a category, as an *a priori* concept, Tillich uses the word mysticism in a special way. By mysticism we usually mean a religious tradition, such as Dutch or Spanish mysticism.²² Tillich does not use the term mysticism in the usual sense, as we might speak of the mysticism of Teresa of Avila. He uses the term mysticism in a sense that is derived from this more usual sense and speaks of the immediate sense of God as a sense of unity, as a unity of the infinite and the finite. He sees this sense of unity as a form of mysticism as well.²³ In a lecture held in Tokyo in 1960 he spoke, in a retrospective on his theology — which I used as the motto for this chapter — about this in the following way: 'The unity of the *infinite* and the *finite* has become one of the fundamental principles of my doctrine of religious experience.'²⁴ He also calls this mystical sense of unity the principle of identity. Taken literally, it is not very clear, for Tillich rejected any identification between God and human beings and strongly emphasized their difference. The immanent God is at the same time the transcendent God.²⁵ By indicating the mystical core of religion as the

principle of identity, he wants, however, to emphasize the indissoluble bond between God and human beings. We encounter here one of Tillich's core ideas, according to which there are two ways to come to God: either we come to God through the victory over the alienation that cuts our original connection with him or we see the encounter with God as an encounter with a stranger.

On the first way man discovers *himself* when he discovers God: he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated.²⁶

Tillich rejects the second way. We do not encounter God as a stranger, for then the encounter would be accidental. Tillich holds that human beings and God are structurally or ontologically connected to each other and therefore sees the first way as the correct way. The human being has an immediate sense of unity with God. Tillich calls that mysticism as a category. By mysticism as a category he therefore means that a concept is given prior to the experience (a concept *a priori*) which makes that experience possible.

It is not easy to analyze this core of Tillich's transcendental accounting for faith, mysticism as a category, more closely. We come across something here that is unique to Tillich's theology. He coins his basic concepts by means of different philosophical and theological traditions that are often in tension with one another. I will attempt to bring some clarity to the matter. I will therefore distinguish between different ways of speaking about the transcendental: philosophical, anthropological and mystical.²⁷ An example of the first use of the term is to be found in Kant, of the second in Schleiermacher, and of the third in Tillich. Differences and similarities with the ways in which Kant and Schleiermacher use the term throw light on Tillich's own use of it.

We find the *philosophical* view in Kant as follows: 'I call all knowledge transcendental that concerns itself not so much with objects but with our *a priori* concepts of objects in general.'²⁸ Kant has in mind here a *priori* forms of intuition, the categories of the intellect and some fundamental propositions that go along with that. These are characterized by their necessity and universal validity and always involve the formal aspect of

²¹ ST II, 96. Tillich writes this in the context of organized religion. The presence of God as a *felt* presence does not seem to be self-evident for religion in the broad sense, which is concerned, after all, with an implicit sense.

²² For this distinction, which has often gone unnoticed in the literature on Tillich, see ST III, 257, II, 96.

²³ 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' MW 4, 291.

²⁴ 'Philosophical Background of my Theology,' MW I, 141.

²⁵ ST I, 263.

²⁶ 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' MW 4, 289.

²⁷ I am using Adriaanse's typology of the religious *a priori*. See H.J. Adriaanse, 'Het idee van een religieus *a priori*' [The Idea of a Religious *a priori*].

²⁸ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kants Werke IV, 23.

knowledge. Kant himself does not give any transcendental analysis of religious experience. Richard Schaeffler, however, has done so along Kantian lines in his *Erfahrung als Dialog mit der Wirklichkeit* (1995).

Kant and Tillich are in agreement on this. With Kant, Tillich pays heed to the requirement of universal validity when he says of mysticism as a category that 'as a quality of every religious experience [mysticism] is universally valid'.²⁹ In Kant the a priori element is completely formal and empty. Tillich differs from him on this in that the constant a priori element in religious experience is filled with a transcendental concept of God, 'the presence of the element of "ultimacy" in the structure of our existence'.³⁰

Kant's transcendental philosophy is primarily an epistemology. In the famous first chapter of *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher gives a *transcendental anthropological* analysis of the human consciousness. There is something that precedes human knowledge and doing, which Schleiermacher calls the immediate self-consciousness or feeling. It is the seat of religion, which Schleiermacher describes as a feeling of absolute dependence on God. He thus arrives at his well-known definition of religion: religion or piety is 'neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness'.³¹ In order to distinguish it from all other feelings, he calls it the feeling of 'being absolutely dependent' or, 'which is the same thing, of being in a relation with God'.³²

Schleiermacher speaks about feeling not as something psychological but as something transcendental, as something that logically precedes knowing and doing. This immediate self-consciousness is therefore to be distinguished from our sensory consciousness. The latter is the consciousness through which we stand in relation to people and things. Sensory consciousness is characterized by intentionality, by the involvement of the human being with something. This is also called the subject-object structure. The immediate consciousness in the human being's relation to God is different from this. It is not a relationship with an object. We will discuss the question of how the relationship with God should be described later (ch. 3.2). Here the issue is that Schleiermacher shows that the feeling or heart of the person precedes knowing and doing and influences the latter two activities.

²⁹ ST III, 258.

³⁰ 'The Problem of Theological Method' (1947), MW 4, 308.

³¹ F. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., I, §3.

³² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., I, §4.

To explain the fact that people engage in religious activities, Schleiermacher points out that this is not coincidental but is anchored in the heart or feeling of the human being. It is inherent in the structure of being human to have a religious faith, even though, of course, which religion people follow is not pre-given. Only a rudimentary awareness of God is pre-given and that receives content through the religions known to us, such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam. This pre-given awareness of God, which every human being is said to have, can be called an a priori or transcendental understanding of God. It is that constant element in religious experience with which this transcendental accounting for faith is concerned.

We can see the similarities with Tillich here. Tillich even acknowledges the affinity between Schleiermacher's ideas on the feeling of absolute dependence and his own description of faith as *ultimate concern*.³³ This constant element, the transcendental awareness of the unconditional, receives, in accordance with the content of religious experience, its own specific content. In the courage to be it is apparent as the Power of Being, but in an aesthetic experience, for example, it is apparent in a different way, i.e. something absolute breaks through the surface of the forms of a painting, as expressionism especially tries to show.

Tillich and Schleiermacher also agree in that both distinguish two elements in the concept of God: a transcendental aspect and one that has to do with content. The first is the constant a priori element in the experience and the second gives it content through the experience in question and more specifically through the religious tradition of the believer. This first element is arrived at by abstracting it from the actual experience. It is presupposed as the a priori element that makes religious experience possible.

Despite a great deal of agreement with Schleiermacher, Tillich provides a different transcendental anthropology by speaking of the a priori element of religious experience as the mystical category. I therefore characterize Tillich's use of the term transcendental as the *mystical variant* of what is called the *religious a priori*. Tillich describes the religious a priori as 'something which belongs to the structure of the human mind itself from which religion arises' and that explains it as an immediate awareness of God or of the unconditional.³⁴

³³ ST I, 47.

³⁴ HCT 527.

For his explanation of mysticism as a category, Tillich makes use of two sources: the Franciscan-Augustinian tradition and the identity philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling, the philosopher of Romanticism. Both sources refer to an immediate knowledge of God. According to the Franciscan-Augustinian tradition, God is actually present in the soul and can be known immediately by the soul. He is the principle of knowledge in whose light everything else can be known.³⁵ Schelling developed, in the transition period to his late philosophy, the theory of 'intellectual intuition' (*Anschaung*).³⁶ With this intuition, this 'immediately intuitive knowledge,' Schelling wants to make the experience of the human relation to the unconditional conceivable. For this, he refers to the concept of intuition in mysticism.³⁷ Tillich follows this line further and develops his mystical a priori as the constant element in religious experience.

Tillich refers, for his explanation of mysticism as a category, to mysticism as a religious tradition and draws a parallel with the mystic's experience of unity. I have treated this more extensively elsewhere³⁸ and will limit myself here to some brief remarks.

For the constant element in religious experience, mysticism as a category, the human being's awareness of unity with God is an essential characteristic. In this, Tillich sees a correspondence with the experience of unity that mystics can have at a certain stage in their mystical development. That is the moment at which the mystic feels himself to be one with God and transcends the ordinary concerns of everyday. St. John of the Cross makes, in this context, a comparison with a ray of sunlight coming through a window. This seems to be a matter of identity, but, in fact, there is duality. If the window is completely clean, one will think that the window is

... identical with the ray of sunlight and shine[s] just as the sun's ray. Although obviously the nature of the window is distinct from that of the sun's ray (even if the two seem identical), we can assert that the window is the ray or light of the sun by participation.³⁹

³⁵ 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' MW 4, 290f.

³⁶ The concept of 'intellectual intuition' has a preliminary history in the *visio intellectualis* of Nicholas of Cusa. This describes the knowledge of God (*scientia Dei*). See U. Dierse and R. Kühlen, 'Anschaung, intellektuelle,' HWPH I, 349-51.

³⁷ Schelling writes: 'The knowledge of the absolute is thus, if it is absolute, also a contemplative knowledge. All direct knowledge in general = A, and insofar all contemplation is A. But because the intellect is the subject of knowing here, this A is an intellect or, as it is called elsewhere, an absolute intellect.' (F.W.J. Schelling, *Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling, 1856-1861, 6, 153, cited by Dierse and Kühlen, 'Anschaung, intellektuelle,' 350).

³⁸ W. Stoker, 'The Mystical in Religious Experience: Tillich's Transcendental Theology of Experience,' 87-110.

³⁹ John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 91.

This mystical experience of unity corresponds, in Tillich's view, with the question with which he is concerned: the immediate awareness of the unconditional, through which the opposition between a subject and an object is transcended. It is for that reason that Tillich calls immediacy the fundamental concept of mysticism.⁴⁰

There is also a difference with respect to the *experience* of the mystics. Mysticism as a category is not yet experience, i.e. quite structured content of awareness providing insight.⁴¹ Religious experience consists, namely, of two inseparable components:

- (1) The 'point' of immediate awareness of the unconditional which is empty but unconditionally certain; and (2) the 'breath' of a concrete concern which is full of content but has the conditional certainty of venturing faith.⁴²

Tillich calls that first component the foundation of religious experience. That foundation is, in his view, self-evident. It thus meets the criteria of the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism, which requires, after all, that something be self-evident and incorrigible (Introduction, §1) to qualify as rational. Is Tillich influenced here by this view of rationality? Before I take up that question, I will first round off my analysis of mysticism as a category.

From the quote above it appears that Tillich views the first component as empty, i.e. 'without content.' It is not entirely clear what he means here. What does 'without content' mean precisely? The full religious experience has no content — that is what the second component provides, which, because of the actually occurring revelation, stamps the religious experience with a certain content. Nevertheless, the first component cannot be viewed as entirely empty or formal. Tillich describes the transcendental concept of God as Being-Itself, as the immediate awareness of God and as a mystical awareness of unity, as is apparent from his reference to the mystic's experience of unity. It is therefore difficult to maintain that the first component is entirely 'without content' like Kant's a priori concepts of the intellect. Take, for example, the first two implicitly religious experiences (§2.1). The first has to do with the courage to be, because of Being-Itself, which is not explicitly recognized by the non-believer but is implicitly present in the act of living. For the Christian it concerns the manifestation of God as creator. In the second experience, that of absolute meaninglessness, all the content has disappeared, but

⁴⁰ 'Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions' (1963), MW 5, 323.

⁴¹ 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' MW 4, 296.

⁴² 'The Problem of Theological Method,' MW 4, 308.

nonetheless the God who can no longer be described continues to hold on to the human being in his experience of the transcendental concept of God. In the explicitly religious experiences of the tradition of a religious community, receives more content because of a category is to be distinguished from. In short, Tillich's mysticism as a category is not formal but filled with Kant's transcendental philosophical concept of God. Here he agrees with Schleiermacher's anthropological view but differs from Schleiermacher in that he does not analyze the human consciousness. Rather, following the analogy of mysticism as a religious tradition, he develops mysticism in that he does not analyze the human consciousness. Rather, following the analogy of mysticism as a religious tradition, he develops mysticism in that he does not analyze the human consciousness.

The awareness of the unconditional is the foundation on which not only religion in the broad sense but also the Christian faith rests. Mysticism as a category is, namely, also the foundation of the explicitly religious experiences such as the personal faith experience of the Christian which Tillich called *prophetic-moral*. If we explore this further, then Tillich seems, indeed, to have been influenced implicitly in his accounting for faith by the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism. In connection with the revelation of salvation in Christ, Tillich speaks of the *fundamental revelation* as the immediate awareness of God. It is the foundation for the revelation of salvation in Christ and functions in a comparable way as Bulmann's pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*). According to Bulmann, there is a pre-understanding of that about which Scripture speaks. The fundamental revelation in Tillich has a similar function here. Because of that revelation we can, according to Tillich, receive the revelation of salvation.⁴³ We have a pre-understanding of it. But it is also more than that. This fundamental revelation is not only the condition for receiving the revelation of salvation but also a *permanent part of the Christian act of faith*. The explicit experiences of God consist, namely, of two elements:

the element of ultimacy, which is a matter of immediate experience and not symbolic in itself, and the element of concreteness, which is taken from our ordinary experience and symbolically applied to God.⁴⁴

In the first aspect the opposition of subject and object is bridged in an immediate presence of God. It is precisely from this immediate awareness of God, this a priori element in experience that faith receives its uncon-

⁴³ 'Rechtfertigung und Zweifel' (1924), MW 6, 91. In Rahner's transcendental analysis this aspect is primary: the human being is such that he can receive a revelation.

⁴⁴ DE, MW 5, 252. Cf. the similar quote to which note 42 refers.

ditional certainty. For the believer it is a 'felt presence of God.' The second aspect has to do with the content of the message of the Christian faith, which has its source in the history of God and human beings culminating in Jesus Christ. Insofar as faith is based on history, such as the exodus from Egypt and the life of Jesus ending in his crucifixion, faith is always uncertain, given the historical (un)reliability of the sources.

Tillich thus shows how faith, because of the one element, the immediate awareness of God, is fundamental in the sense that it is self-evident and unconditionally certain.⁴⁵ In my view, this is a case of his being influenced by classical foundationalism's view of rationality. In place of the proofs of God's existence he substitutes the transcendental concept of God as the foundation for faith. It meets the condition of indisputability which classical foundationalism demands of the foundations of knowledge. The transcendental concept of God is, namely, something of which the human being is immediately aware.

How does Tillich account for the second element of religious experience, the Christian faith in particular? To what extent does the classical view of rationality also play a role?

3. The Tension between Faith and History

(Biblical) revelation is not a communication of supernatural truths, as in Locke's classical accounting for faith. Neither does it convey scientific knowledge. Tillich formulated his position carefully in the motto I chose for this chapter as follows:

Revelation is the manifestation of the ultimate ground and meaning of human existence (and implicitly of all existence). It is not a matter of objective knowledge, of empirical research or rational inference. It is a matter of ultimate concern; it grasps the total personality and is effective through a set of symbols.⁴⁶

With this view of biblical revelation Tillich transcends the tension between reason and faith that has been so characteristic of philosophy since the Enlightenment. He breaks with the distinction in classical apologetics between universal reason as the area of natural theology and the biblical revelation as the communication of supernatural truths. Like

⁴⁵ 'The Problem of Theological Method,' MW 4, 308; DE, MW 5, 142; 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' MW 4, 290f.

⁴⁶ 'The Problem of Theological Method,' MW 4, 308.

Schleiermacher in his *Dialektik*. Tillich also shows, in the first part of his *Systematic Theology*, the inadequacy of autonomous reason.

The third implicitly religious experience concerned science and can thus for truth, among other things. Reason has a depth-dimension and can thus inquire into truth (§2.1). Tillich believes that reason therefore also seeks revelation in connection with the conflicts in which it has become trapped. Here he inverts the position of Kant, who sought a religion within the bounds of reason. In Tillich reason lies within the bounds of religion (in the broad sense of being concerned with the ultimate). That also clarifies Tillich's method of correlation in which Scripture provides answers to universal human questions of meaning. These questions are posed on the basis of human existence, which is already within the bounds of religion in the broad sense and therefore there is a mutual relationship between question and answer.

It is a different matter with respect to how the Christian faith deals with possible scientific criticism. As regards the relation between faith and the natural sciences, Tillich sees no conflicts because, in his view, they are concerned with different areas.⁴⁷ He does, however, see a problem with respect to historical studies, especially with the historical-critical research into Jesus. Tillich attempts to fend off possible historical criticism in the following way.

Sacred historical figures have biographical and symbolic aspects. Insofar as persons such as Christ or Buddha are viewed as symbols, they have no place in the 'objective world.' As symbols, they are not empirical, even though they existed as human beings in the empirical order. As symbols, they represent the religious Transcendent and are therefore immune to all historical criticism.⁴⁸ The proper question to be asked regarding a symbol is how purely it expresses religious Transcendence. Only the vertical relationship, the relationship to God, is of importance; the horizontal relation, history, has no significance. Historical criticism therefore plays hardly any role in the interpretation of symbols.

In this way Tillich shows how religion can be immunized against possible historical criticism — despite his own culturally oriented theology. How did that happen? I think that Tillich was forced in this direction because of the influence of classical foundationalism's view of rational-

⁴⁷ DF, MW 5, 268-70. On the basis of Tillich's theology, a fruitful discussion with the natural sciences is possible. See part two of G. Hummel (ed.), *Natural Theology versus Theology of Nature?*

⁴⁸ 'The Religious Symbol/Symbol and Knowledge' (1940-1941), MW 4, 265ff.; 'Das Wesen der religiösen Sprache' (1959), *Gesammelte Werke* 5, 221.

ity. This is at odds with every religious faith that is anchored in history. Let us explore this more deeply.⁴⁹

Tillich wrestles with the tension between rationality and history. Thus he remarks that:

The truth of faith cannot be made dependent on the historical truth of the stories and legends in which faith has expressed itself. It is a disastrous distortion of the meaning of faith to identify it with the belief in the historical validity of the Biblical stories.⁵⁰

In itself, the distinction between historical and religious faith says little about any influence by the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism. This occurs only where this distinction develops into a separation. That happened with Lessing, who saw a broad ditch separating faith based on history and proper religious faith. Tillich stops just short of this. He attempts to hold on to the historical and factual aspect of the faith, for the Christian faith is based on *Jesus* as the Christ. He wrestles with Lessing's broad ditch between the 'contingent truths of history' and the 'eternal truths of reason' of religion — a ditch over which no one can jump.⁵¹ Tillich points, in the context of the research into the historical Jesus, to a leap that cannot be made. The historian can never attain certainty, only a high degree of probability. 'It would, however, be a leap to another level if [the theologian] transformed historical probability into positive or negative historical certainty by a judgment of faith'⁵²

But how can Tillich then connect the Christ of faith with the (historical) Jesus of Nazareth? He attempts to do so in the following way. His starting point is the faith of the Christian, her being grasped by the New Being. This being grasped occurs because of the 'image' that the New Testament gives of Christ. How are this image of Christ with his effect on the believer and the story of Jesus of Nazareth linked? Tillich acknowledges, in addition to this being grasped by the New Being, the receptive aspect of faith, including its historical and factual aspect, the personal life of Jesus. Because the path of historical research, with its continually corrigible results, is blocked to him, he uses reason to argue for the historical and factual aspect on which the Christian faith is based. He derives the receptive aspect of faith from the aspect of historical factuality. The effect of the New Being on the believer can, namely, be

⁴⁹ For a more extensive treatment of this issue see W. Stoker, 'Faith, Truth and History,' 103-20.

⁵⁰ DF, MW 5, 271.

⁵¹ G.E. Lessing, 'Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft,' *Werke* VIII, 12-14.

⁵² ST II, 120.

understood only if the New Being has also appeared concretely in a human being. Otherwise, it is impossible to see how the biblical image of Christ has transformative power.

It can be definitely asserted that through this picture the New Being has power to transform those who are transformed by it. This implies that there is an *analogia imaginis*, namely, an analogy between the image and the actual personal life from which it has arisen.⁵³

All stress thus comes to lie on the receptive aspect of the Christian faith. We can see how Tillich, on the basis of the receptive aspect, attempts to reason back to the historical factuality, the personal life of Jesus. He believes that the Christian act of faith, the participation in the New Being, can also guarantee the historical foundation of Christianity:

Participation, not historical argument, guarantees the reality of the event upon which Christianity is based. It guarantees a personal life in which the New Being has conquered the old being.⁵⁴

This, in my view, is a move of desperation on his part, which I can explain only on the basis of Tillich's implicit acceptance of the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism with its sharp distinction between indisputable knowledge and uncertain opinion. According to this view, the Christian faith must either be *knowledge* in the sense of being unconditionally certain — that is, however, impossible insofar as the Christian faith is anchored in history — or it is only an *opinion* that is always subject to doubt. The latter does not do any justice to religious faith that, after all, is the *ultimate concern* of human beings. Tillich emerges from this impasse through a *tour de force*. He gives the Christian faith the status of knowledge with its qualification of indisputability, and certainly despite the fact that it is historically anchored. He does this by anchoring the historical foundation of Christian faith (Jesus of Nazareth) itself in the participation of the believer in the New Being. The undoubted certainty of the faith is not limited, according to him, to the transcendental element of religious experience but obtains for the whole of the Christian faith. He puts it in the category of self-guaranteeing statements, as is apparent from the following quote: 'faith itself is the immediate (not mediated by conclusions) evidence of the New Being.'⁵⁵

Tillich's solution is not convincing. Self-evident faith, with its incorrigible propositions, cannot guarantee a corrigible historical statement. That is, to invoke Lessing here, a category mistake. Tillich moves in the direction opposite to that taken by Lessing's orthodox opponent at the time, J.D. Schumann, who advanced historical proofs for the truth of the faith.⁵⁶ Although Tillich does not advance any 'contingent truths of history' as evidence for 'eternal truths of reason,' he does consider the immediately self-evident faith (participation in the New Being) to be 'evidence' for historical propositions about the realization of the New Being in a historical, concrete person.⁵⁷ Faith would then guarantee the historical concreteness of the image of Christ. John Clayton points out correctly that in this way Tillich smuggles a corrigible, contingent assertion into the category of self-verifying statements.⁵⁸

By making the Christian faith its own guarantee, Tillich believes that the Christian faith becomes immune to historical criticism.⁵⁹ If we would rely on a historical foundation for faith, major problems would arise, according to Tillich. The theologian would then have to wait with fear and trembling for the postman to bring new facts about the 'life of Jesus,' which would mean that he would then have to adjust his theology.⁶⁰ With his teacher, M. Kähler, Tillich therefore seeks the reality of Christ outside the — in his view — scarcely datable biographical facts about the historical Jesus. In this way faith transcends historical reality, moving in the direction of the 'superhistorical' reality of Christ. Historical facts thus have no theological meaning. In his *Systematic Theology* historical research functions only as an assistant to theology, informing us about, for example, the development of Christological symbols such as the Son of David or the Son of Man.⁶¹

The problem with Tillich's appeal to the self-evident nature of faith is not only that it immunizes the specific Christian faith against historical criticism but that it also protects the Christian faith from *any* refutation whatsoever. The believer's experience refers to itself and its religious

⁵⁶ J.D. Schumann, *Ueber die Evidenz der Beweise für die Wahrheit der christliche Religion*.

⁵⁷ ST II, 132, 114. Elsewhere Tillich does not do this, with the result that a ditch appears between the historical person of Jesus and the image of the Christ: Rejoinder, *The Journal of Religion* 46 (1966), 192.

⁵⁸ J.P. Clayton, 'Is Jesus Necessary for Christology?' in: *Christ, Faith and History*, 156-58.

⁵⁹ DF, MW 5, 271f.

⁶⁰ 'The Problem of Theological Method,' MW 4, 307.

⁶¹ ST II, 123-30, 125.

⁵³ ST II, 132 (italics mine); ⁵⁴ A Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Incarnation' (1949), MW 6, 314.

⁵⁴ ST II, 131: DF, MW 5, 271f.

⁵⁵ ST II, 131.

truth cannot be argued nor refuted. The truth of the Christian faith is self-evident for the believer with the result that the grounds for believing can, not be distinguished from the faith for which the grounds are produced. Being rational entails, in my view, at least openness to criticism or possible refutation. Because Tillich, influenced as he is by the classical view of rationality, sees a tension between faith and history, he is unable to account for the Christian faith itself which is anchored in history. Tillich does not so much account for the Christian faith as for religion in general. The heart of his accounting for faith consists in arguing that that religion belongs to human nature. He clarifies that by pointing to a religious a priori in all experience.

4. A Dialogical Accounting for Faith

In the introduction to this study I discussed the challenges that a contemporary accounting for faith has to meet. The most important was to make experience central, because of the minority position of believers today. With the thesis that religious experience is as broad as experience itself Tillich takes up this challenge. Experience is the central concept of this way of accounting for faith. The event of the religious experience in Gauduin's painting 'The Vision after the Sermon' would not be broad enough for him, since it reflects only explicitly religious experience.

An accounting for faith also needs to take seriously the fact of a pluralistic society with respect to worldviews. How does Tillich's accounting for faith take up this challenge? Some brief remarks about this will show how Tillich gives a dialogical accounting for faith, whereby he does not want to exclude either secular or religious believers.

Tillich is concerned primarily with the dialogue with secular culture. His discussion with the secularized person is 'inclusivist,' because he includes the secular worldview in his broad view of religion as ultimate concern. The experiences of non-believers or people of other beliefs also have, after all, an implicit religious element. Only at the end of his life did Tillich begin to pay attention to the other world religions.

The immediate awareness of the unconditional, mysticism as a category, characterizes an experience as religious through its reference to the ultimate and the unconditional. Although Tillich's analysis starts from his own Christian religion, there are, of course, religious experiences outside of the Christian religion as well. The transcendental aspect in experience to which Tillich points obtains also for them, it seems to me. There

is a problem here with respect to Buddhism, because Buddhism has no concept of the absolute or of God. Nevertheless, one can, in my view, solve this problem by referring to the second, empty, implicitly religious experience, which reflects a situation in which faith has no explicit content (§2.1).

Referring to this a priori element in religious experience does not do justice to the variety of religions. Tillich recognizes that. In his discussion with other religions, he maintains his Christian identity but leaves some room for revelation outside of the Christian faith. Just as religious experience is as broad as experience itself, so everything in the world of humans and nature can in principle be a symbol for religious transcendence. In the context of interreligious dialogue I will indicate how Tillich determines when we are talking about a 'religious' symbol.

How can we discuss God as purely as possible in the language of the religious symbol? Tillich cites different criteria for establishing the truth of a symbol. The most important is the 'unconditional criterion' or criterion of adequacy (*Angemessenheit*). 'That symbol is most adequate which expresses not only the ultimate but also its own lack of ultimacy.'⁶² In other words, the truth of a religious symbol consists in its quality of self-negation so that that to which it refers can shine through it. He takes this criterion from an important symbol of the Christian faith, the cross of Christ. That is, for Tillich, the true symbol *par excellence*, because Jesus sacrificed himself so that he would not be a God next to God. Through this self-negation He becomes transparent to God. The criterion for the truth of the symbol and therefore for the truth of the faith is ultimately the crucifixion event. 'The event which has created this symbol has given the criterion by which the truth of *Christianity*, as well as of any other religion, must be judged.'⁶³ Revelation occurs wherever it occurs. Thus Tillich holds that it is possible that the goal of the history of religion, the 'Religion of the Concrete Spirit' has not only been made manifest in Jesus Christ but also in, for example, Buddha, who, like Christ, resisted the temptation to be divinized.⁶⁴

⁶² DF, MW 5, 276: 'The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols' (1961), MW 4, 419f.; 'Das Wesen der religiösen Sprache,' GW 5, 222.

⁶³ DF, MW 5, 276 (italics mine).

⁶⁴ Lecture, 'Philosophy of Religion,' W. Schüssler, *Paul Tillich*, 75.

5. Concluding Remarks

We have seen how Tillich worked out the three characteristics of a transcendental accounting for faith that we provided in the introduction to this chapter.

1. Religion is part of the structure of the human being. To establish this he refers to mysticism as a category and makes it the *a priori* element in experience.
 2. He demonstrates that religion is part of human nature by seeing religious experience as broad as experience itself. He does so by distinguishing between implicitly and explicitly religious experiences. Religious experience is thus the core concept of this way of accounting for faith.
 3. The awareness of God is fundamental. He argues for this via a transcendental concept of God.
- By way of conclusion I will comment briefly on the way in which Tillich has worked this out. I will begin with the last characteristic.

Tillich shows that the *awareness of God* is *fundamental* without providing any kind of proof of God's existence. Alvin Plantinga also considers God's existence to be fundamental and does not provide any proof of God's existence either. With Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin, Plantinga argues that God has equipped us with a capacity for recognizing the divine, the *sensus divinitatis*. Under the right circumstances, this causes faith in God to arise in a direct way (without being mediated by any process of reasoning). Seeing the wide starry expanse we feel small in comparison to God's majesty and thus experience God's presence.⁶⁵ Plantinga considers faith in God to be warranted in this way. The *sensus divinitatis* functions properly whenever it causes us to believe in God. Tillich can also say something similar on the basis of his transcendental concept of God.

There is, however, a major difference between the two with respect to their views of rationality. Plantinga has criticized classical foundationalism and argues that belief in God does not obviously need good grounds to be rational. Faith in God is *basic* because it does not need to be derived via reason. And belief in God is *properly basic*, because it belongs to the foundation of propositions that cannot be rationally defended. Plantinga thus broadens the class of fundamental propositions that classical foundationalism had limited to that which was self-evident and incorrigible to

⁶⁵ A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 173f.

include propositions that are not self-evident.⁶⁶ In contrast, we saw that Tillich could not abandon the classical view of rationality and holds that both the awareness of God as well as the Christian faith in particular meet the requirement of being self-evident.

The way in which Tillich works out his position that religious experience is as broad as experience itself is fascinating but not convincing. This position is, after all, part of the framework of Tillich's view that *religion is part of human nature*. Our contemporary, pluralistic and often agnostic culture does not find that position very convincing. Tillich speaks of the immediate awareness of God as the 'birth-hour of religion in the human being.'⁶⁷ In my view, religion is more a matter of socialization than of capacity. I have dealt with this elsewhere.⁶⁸ Tillich takes religious experience in a very broad way indeed if we look at his examples of implicitly religious experiences. To point to a religious *a priori* in those experiences is problematic. How unsatisfactory an appeal to this principle is is apparent if we, for instance, look at the first two implicitly religious experiences.

The first existential experience is one of the experience of being which is said to refer immediately to God. That is certainly the case for the believer in God; it is for her an experience of creation. But the non-religious humanist would be somewhat more reticent with respect to Tillich's claim. For him, it is not a religious experience. On the basis of his humanist worldview P. Kurtz gives an alternative view of the courage to be.⁶⁹

Tillich considers it impossible to deny God or the absolute. After all, this is presupposed in every experience, according to the mystical *a priori* element, even in the experience of the nihilist, the skeptic and the atheist. They are said, nevertheless, to experience Being-Itself while doubting all truth and meaning, conscious of being surrounded by it but unable to put their experience into words. Would this convince a real skeptic? As little as lack of knowledge implies knowledge, so lack of truth does not imply truth. Nietzsche holds that the attitude of radical doubt does not refer to God but is to be conquered through a nihilism that no longer poses the question of truth. Even if the position of secular

⁶⁶ For a critical discussion of Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief* see G. van den Brink, 'Waarborg en de epistemische status van het christelijk geloof,' [Warrant and the Epistemic Status of the Christian Faith]. For an introduction to Plantinga's work see R. van Woudenberg and B. Cusveller (eds), *De kentheorie van Alvin Plantinga* [The Epistemology of Alvin Plantinga] and, in connection with Tillich and Barth, see D.-M. Grube, *Unergründbarkeit Gottes?*

⁶⁷ 'Rechtfertigung und Zweifel,' GW 8, 92.

⁶⁸ W. Stoker, 'Are Human Beings Religious by Nature?'

⁶⁹ P. Kurtz, *Living without Religion*, 116f.

humanists and that of Nietzsche are rejected, that does not detract from the fact that Tillich's solution is too easy. He refers ultimately to an intuitive, immediate, mystical element with the claim of universal validity. This cuts off all discussion of other interpretations.

In the course of this study I will offer an alternative for the religious a priori. Instead, I will propose that we speak of a worldview a priori (ch. 3.5.1).

The way in which Tillich postulates mysticism as a category is problematic. He made, as we say, use of the Franciscan-Augustinian tradition, according to which God is actually present in the soul and can be known immediately by the soul. God is the principle of knowledge, in whose light everything else can be known. His other source was Schelling's theory of intellectual intuition (§2.2).

Tillich does object to the term 'intuition,' because, in his view, the unconditional cannot be intuited.⁷⁰ He speaks of an ontological awareness of the absolute that is immediate and not dependent on observations and rational conclusions. It is then present whenever our attention is consciously directed at it. In fact, Tillich does not escape using the term intuition. He does not describe the mystical element as something discursive, as a matter of reasoning. Kant rejected the notion of intellectual intuition for the human being. The reasoning intellect is referred to a categorical intuition, given that the human being is dependent on the interplay between a priori concepts and the material that the senses give him. The appeal to intuitive insights is weak, because they often correspond to our thought patterns. Many an intuitively gained insight has later appeared to be mistaken.⁷¹

The view of rationality in classical foundationalism, which has influenced Tillich's way of accounting for faith, is no longer adequate: it is at odds with history. The question of whether faith is rational needs to be answered now on the basis of a practice-oriented rationality. In Part II of this study I will, unlike Tillich, start with the *historically based* Christian faith. It is difficult, in my view, to separate the Christian faith from its historical foundation. Historical criticism, liberated from its positivistic constraints, is, in my view, the only way to acquire reliable knowledge of the past. One cannot escape that by introducing a Kantian division between historical reality and the 'supernatural' reality of faith. In Part II we will see that in a practice-oriented rationality the problem of faith and history arises in an entirely different way.

⁷⁰ 'The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,' *MW* 4, 296.

⁷¹ H. Albert, *Traktat über kritische Vernunft*, 24f.; Brown, *Rationality*, 58.

2. THE OBJECTIVITY OF PERCEIVING GOD

(WILLIAM P. ALSTON)

... the perceptual experience itself functions as a ground simply by the fact that in that experience the object presents itself to the subject as so-and-so.
Alston, *Perceiving God*, 288

1. Introduction

Tillich is an example of accounting for faith from the perspective of the German philosophical tradition. He works with an a priori conception: religion is a part of human nature. The concept of God is the foundation for the edifice of religion. Faith in God is immediately certain, for it is self-evident. That obtains even for the whole of the Christian faith as being grasped by the New Being. The basis for faith lies in an experience that is itself irrefutable. Such participation in the New Being wards off criticism of faith, because it is self-evident, a self-authenticating experience.

We will now direct our attention to an example of accounting for faith from the perspective of Anglo-American philosophy — that of William P. Alston's *Perceiving God*. Alston works with an a posteriori conception, reflecting on the direct perceptions people have of God. His accounting for faith is stamped by the analytical tradition. He sees perception as a model of experience (9).¹ Alston does acknowledge the tradition of the theology of transcendental experience but prefers to work from religious experience as a 'putative direct experiential awareness of God' (34f.). Alston recognizes that appealing to the self-evident nature of faith make it immune to critique. His alternative is a direct perception of God that can be refuted. It is, after all, possible that such a perception is deceptive and therefore not true. *Experience as perception* is the basis for faith. He borrows examples (12-28) of direct perception from, among others, William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, such as these:

¹ W. P. Alston, *Perceiving God*. The references in the text are to this work.

I remember the night, and almost the very spot on the hill-top, where my soul opened out, as it were, into the infinite, and there was a rushing together of the two worlds, the inner and the outer. It was deep calling unto deep — the deep that my own struggle had opened up within being answered by the unfathomable deep without, reaching beyond the stars. I stood alone with Him who had made me, and all the beauty of the world, and love, and sorrow, and even temptation, I did not seek Him, but felt the perfect unison of my spirit with His. The ordinary sense of things around me faded. For the moment nothing but an ineffable joy and exaltation remained. (22)²

Alston believes that such a direct awareness of God can justify beliefs concerning God. Through such direct perceptions we are, depending on the content of the perception, justified in believing that God guides us, forgives us, etc.

In order to avoid the term religious experience, which he sees as vague, Alston defines the direct awareness of God as a 'mystical experience' (35). The word mystical is used here in a broad sense: it refers not only to the experiences of the great mystics but also to experiences that 'ordinary' believers have. Innumerable people have testified that God is directly present for them, as the example cited above indicates. I will use the term religious experience — Alston uses the latter in the subtitle to his book as well. We should remember here that experience is viewed as refutable. This makes religious perception similar to sense perception. Alston concentrates on direct, momentary religious experiences. This does not mean that he denies that there are lasting religious experiences (35). Both enter into his cumulative argument for the Christian faith.

In an autobiographical sketch on his own return to the Christian faith, it is precisely the importance of lasting experiences precisely that Alston emphasizes. 'My way back was not by abstract philosophical reasoning but by experience — experience of the love of God and the presence of the Spirit, as found within the community of the faithful But though mine was an experiential way into faith, it did not follow the evangelical pattern of an overwhelming conviction of sin, followed by an equally overwhelming sense of release when one commits oneself to Christ.' On being Christian he says: 'It involves the attempt to grow in one's understanding of the faith through study of the Scriptures and the theological tradition and through thinking about the issues they raise.'

Of his faith he says that it is more a matter of growth than of a sudden experience after which his was suddenly changed: '... I think of the Christian life more on the Catholic model of a gradual process —

a gradual sanctification of the person, a process that will presumably be continued after death, as well throughout this life — rather than as a once-and-for-all being *saved*, after which one is with the sheep rather than the goats, and that's that.'³

For various reasons Alston's accounting for faith demands attention. He rejects classical foundationalism and replaces it by a modest foundationalism. As an Episcopalian, he belongs to the school of 'Reformed Epistemology' as do Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. His accounting for faith is important precisely because he starts with religious experience. He wants to give a positive reason for the Christian faith. As an expert in epistemology, he applies his own insights to his accounting for faith. Strictly understood, he is concerned, in *Perceiving God*, with an epistemology of religious experience but, in fact, gives, as we will see, an accounting for faith.

As a foundationalist, Alston is searching for a foundation for faith but can no longer find one that is indisputable or incorrigible. He finds a foundation, however, in the direct perception of God. That perception includes an objective aspect in that God reveals himself in such a perception. Such a perception is given, according to him, essentially *non-conceptually*, that is, without any simultaneous process of conceptualization.

Such a theory of pure experience often leads to the view that religions are essentially the same. The differences arise only because of how this pure experience is worked out in a religion's particular teachings, rituals and ethics. Pure experiences of God by mystics are supposed to be the same, but their interpretation differs from tradition to tradition because of their being stamped by their tradition. Alston himself rejects the view that religions are essentially the same. For a further analysis of what religious experience is, it is important to discuss the question of whether experience is not determined by concepts. For accounting for faith it does make a difference whether the believer, as Alston holds, can point to an objective aspect in religious experience.

Alston's accounting for faith is also significant because he views faith as a web of beliefs, rituals and ethics. He thus breaks with the often abstract discussions of isolated propositions of whether God exists found in some analytical treatments of the philosophy of religion. For him, direct perceptions of God are part of the broader context of other expressions of faith. Faith convictions function not in isolation but in cohesion, a web of beliefs, rituals and conduct. Together with non-direct lasting experiences

² W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 61.

³ Alston, 'A Philosopher's Way Back to Faith,' 28f.

of God, the direct perceptions of God form a *cumulative argument* for the Christian faith.

This view of religion as a web is endorsed by many today and will also be used in this study. It replaces the view employed by classical apologetics that religion includes an elementary level of natural truths about God and morality — truths that are knowable through reason (natural theology) — and a secondary level of supernatural or suprarational truths of the Christian faith in particular.

After Kari's critique of natural theology Schleiermacher abandoned the system of elementary and secondary levels. His starting point became the Christian faith in particular, in which he distinguished a transcendental aspect as the immediate awareness of God. We saw something similar in Tillich in the previous chapter. He also started with religious experience, in which he referred to mysticism as a category, as the transcendental aspect of experience. It is primarily through Wittgenstein's concepts of language games and ways of life that the understanding of faith as a web of convictions, rituals and conduct has gained currency. Different terms are used for this: language games, contexts, normative frameworks, ways of life. In the rest of this study I will use, as an umbrella term, *practice or way of life* for the larger whole of the Christian faith. I will not be using the term *practice* in a Marxist way, i.e. as praxis in distinction from theory. By practice I understand a social symbolic system of signs, norms and rules.

Speaking of the Christian faith as practice raises the question of the *rationality of such a practice*. Let us assume that there are different practices in society, such as those of science, the judiciary, public office and religion. Does each practice have its own set of rules that determine what may or may not be done and how? And does it have beliefs with their own rationality that are bound to the practice? Some emphasize the uniqueness of the practice so strongly that they claim that every practice has its own rationality. That is the position of *contextualism*, according to which there are many rationalities. For accounting for faith it seems thus difficult to avoid fideism. Faith is reasonable according to one's own practice, but it cannot be satisfactorily explained to those adhering to a different practice because faith has only an internal rationality.

In this study I will use a practice-oriented rationality. The question is whether this also entails contextualism and therefore fideism. I can answer this question only at the conclusion of this study. I will then comment further on contextualism in the context of my attempt at accounting for faith (ch. 6.2). In this chapter we will see how Alston critiques contextualism

and does not see it as an obvious conclusion to his practice-oriented rationality.

I will first give a short sketch of Alston's cumulative argument (§2). I will then explore two issues: first, Alston's theory of the pure, non-conceptual experience (§3) and, second, the difference between a practice-oriented rationality and the practice-relative rationality of contextualism (§4). Finally, I will evaluate this way of accounting for faith (§5).

2. Perceiving God

Alston does not, as Plantinga does, provide an apologetics in which he starts from faith and leaves it to the skeptic to refute it. He wants to provide a positive reason for the Christian faith as well (197). For this he points in the first instance to direct perceptions of God. A direct perception of God justifies the person who has such a perception in having certain beliefs concerning God. These are beliefs that have arisen through direct perceptions of God. Alston calls them 'manifestation-beliefs'. An example of a direct perception that contains a conviction is the following:

... all at once I experienced a feeling, of being raised above myself, I felt the presence of God — I tell of the thing just as I was conscious of it — as if his goodness and his power were penetrating me altogether I thanked God that in the course of my life he had taught me to know him, that he sustained my life and took pity both on the insignificant creature and on the sinner that I was. I begged him ardently that my life might be consecrated to the doing of his will. I felt his reply, which was that I should do his will from day to day, in humility and poverty, leaving him, the Almighty God, to be judge of whether I should some time be called to bear witness more conspicuously. Then, slowly, the ecstasy left my heart; that is, I felt that God had withdrawn the communion which he had granted I asked myself if it were possible that Moses on Sinai could have had a more intimate communion with God. I think it well to add that in this ecstasy of mine God had neither form, color, odor, nor taste; moreover, that the feeling of his presence was accompanied with no determinate localization But the more I seek words to express this intimate intercourse, the more I feel the impossibility of describing the thing by any of our usual images. At bottom the expression most apt to render what I felt is this: God was present, though invisible; he fell under no one of my senses, yet my consciousness perceived him. (12)⁴

⁴ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 62–63.

From such a mystical perception we can learn what God does to us at a given moment: scold, forgive, instruct, lead, console or simply be present. Thus we can learn what God's will is for us in a given situation.

(293). Alston develops his *positive reason for faith in three steps*:

1. A direct perception of God is rationally reliable.
2. The direct perception has an objective aspect, through which it obtains as a foundation for faith.
3. Such a direct perception functions as part of Christian faith as a whole, viewed as a web of beliefs. Together with other grounds for faith, it forms

a cumulative argument. Alston's development of his cumulative argument is rather technical. Therefore, I will begin with Alston's concrete example — the accounting for faith by a student named Denise (305-07). She has a direct perception of God but not the deep mystical experiences of Teresa of Avila. Denise, who has been raised as a Christian, doubts whether it is rational to accept the Christian faith. She knows that there are other religions with claims to truth as well. Why should her own Christian faith be the true one? Or is it that all religions are based on illusion? She questions classical apologetics with its appeal to miracles and the fulfillment of prophecy. She also questions the historical reliability of the Bible. The proofs of God's existence do not convince her. She then begins to reflect on her own experience of the Christian life: her sense of communion with God through liturgy and prayer, her sense of renewal after confessing her sins. Slowly her sense of God receives more relief and form and she experiences God as a God who supports her through his love and renews her as a human being. She experiences a direct acquaintance with Him. Is this personal acquaintance with God not the crucial evidence for which Denise was searching to support her initial uncritical acceptance of the faith. Nonetheless, she still has doubts about epistemic force of these direct perceptions as a foundation for her faith. She slowly grows desperate.

Perhaps because of Alston's way of accounting for faith, she has a new idea. She should no longer search for an indisputable and incorrigible foundation without support from other sources. It is better to have several grounds for support. Even if she can doubt each one separately and none of them alone makes her faith absolutely certain, they support one another and strengthen the beliefs for which they were invoked. She can thus point to the testimonies of others, to God's acts such as those recorded in Scripture or to general philosophical reasons for believing

that Christian talk about God makes sense. If these more indirect beliefs prove, nevertheless, to be questionable, she can fall back on her 'immediate, intimate sense of the presence and activity of God in her life to (rightfully) assure herself that it is not all the work of human imagination' (306).

We see how Denise moves from classical apologetics, with its emphasis on miracles and the proofs of God's existence, to Alston's cumulative argument. For Denise, the immediate experience of God's presence goes together with non-direct, lasting experiences, even though the latter is not given much attention in this example. In Gauguin's painting, 'The Vision after the Sermon,' we see a cohesion between the direct, momentary experience of Jacob's wrestling with the unknown man and the lasting faith experience of the Breton women who have just heard a sermon about this event. This is also the case with Denise. Alston acknowledges the latter, the non-direct lasting experiences as well but starts with the former, the direct perception of God. The strongest link in Denise's cumulative argument is an immediate sense of the presence and activity of God. That is the first step in Alston's accounting for faith and he pays a great deal of attention to this step. Why is a direct perception of God rationally reliable?

Tillich's solution is not an option for Alston: a religious perception is not self-evident. But how do we then know that direct perceptions of God are reliable? In that respect religious perceptions are similar to our ordinary sense perceptions, according to Alston. These cannot be justified epistemologically either. A perception therefore does not appear to be self-evident and certain in the sense that modern classical foundationalism required. A perception is fallible and can be refuted.

2.1. *Perception as a Doxastic Practice*

Alston rejects the view that the experience of God is self-authenticating, for which Tillich argued. Thus the experience itself provides the justification for believing that it is a genuine experience of God's presence (80). The eighteenth-century man of letters and theologian G.E. Lessing answered the attack of the historical critique on the Christian faith in the same spirit as Tillich. According to him, the Christian is immediately certain of his faith regardless of the results of historical research.

For him (the Christian) it is simply Christianity which he defends, in which he *feels* blessed. If the paralytic *experiences* the charitable shocks

of electric sparks — what is it to him whether Noller or Franklin or neither are right?⁵

The truth of the Christian faith is thus based on a feeling that gives us rest. The believer experiences, through a shock similar to an electric charge, that his experience receives a sign of authenticity. It is self-evident and self-authenticating. The consequence is that the basis for faith cannot be distinguished from the faith conviction itself for which the basis is adduced. It thus becomes difficult to distinguish true religious experiences from false ones.

One should, however, Alston proposes, be able to account for an experience in response to critique and such can therefore be refuted (295). A direct perception of God — which is not, after all, self-evident — meets this requirement. This perception is an adequate ground for faith — adequate in the sense that it is reliable in its claim to say something true about God (73f.). It is not, however, a foundation in the sense of classical foundationalism, i.e. it is not indisputable. Why is this so?

The reliability of such perceptions can, namely, be proven only in a circular way. That which one wants to prove is already presupposed in the premises of the proof. That obtains also for our sense perceptions, as Alston shows extensively in the third chapter of *Perceiving God*. If one attempts to prove their reliability, this constantly occurs by assuming the reliability of the sense perceptions as a source for the premises of the proof. This is circular reasoning. Descartes and Hume had already acknowledged this and therefore sought a sure foundation in their epistemology other than sense perception. If that foundation is rejected, then we have a crisis in rationality. Does Alston fall into that trap?

Alston also searches along the lines of foundationalism for a foundation for the Christian faith. He views 'perceptual beliefs' as 'properly basic beliefs' (196), but they are so no longer in the classical sense of the word, in the sense of self-evident or incorrigible. Alston retains foundationalism but rejects its classical form. Foundationalism is a theory of the structure of knowledge: indirectly justified knowledge is dependent on immediately justified beliefs.⁶ Knowledge is like a tree with branches which end at a certain point: immediately justified belief.⁷ Immediate justification is the heart of foundationalism and Alston also endorses that.

Alston criticizes classical foundationalism in two ways. We already encountered the first in his critique of immunization which arises through viewing religious experiences as self-evident or self-authenticating. Direct sense perceptions do not appear to be fundamental in the sense of classical foundationalism. The second entails a correction of what exactly obtains as a foundation. The requirement of indisputability and incorrigibility is too strict for immediate justification. One can remain a *foundationalist* without, Alston believes, meeting that requirement. He himself defends, in place of a strong foundationalism, a modest foundationalism that does search for foundations, but those are no longer characterized by indisputability. Final foundations, such sense or religious perceptions cannot be justified according to the requirement of indisputability, because of the simple reason that their reliability cannot be proven.

Direct Perceptions are Reliable

Following Thomas Reid (1710-1796) especially, Alston searches for a solution to the problem of the non-provability of the reliability of sensory experiences and thereby also of the direct perception of God. Reid shows how beliefs are formed and how memory, perception, etc. are active in that process. The capacities cited are dispositions, constant patterns of behaviour that are part of human nature. He calls them 'the principles of common sense' or 'first principles.' Credulity is also such an 'original principle of human nature.'⁸ These first principles are direct beliefs that adults presuppose in their daily reasoning and lives. They are so obvious that every healthy thinking person agrees with them:

When a man in the common course of life gives credit to the testimony of his senses, his memory, or his reason, he does not put the question to himself, whether these faculties may deceive him; yet the trust he reposes in them supposes an inward conviction, that, in that instance at least, they do not deceive him.⁹

We can see how Reid starts with the reliability of our capacities even if we do not have any evidence for them. If a skeptic asks him why he believes in the existence of an external object that he perceives, he answers: 'This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the

⁵ G.E. Lessing, *Gegenätze*, Werke VII, 812f.

⁶ Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, 61.

⁷ Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, 42f.

⁸ See N. Wolterstorff on the principle of credulity in Reid, 'Thomas Reid on Rationality', 47-50.

⁹ Reid, *Essays* VI, 5 (cited by Wolterstorff, 'Thomas Reid on Rationality', 52).

ment of Nature' (151). We consider processes like sense perception, memory, non-deductive reasoning, etc. to be reliable, because we are simply accustomed to doing so in everyday life.

Following Reid, Alston speaks of the coming into existence of sense perception as a 'doxastic practice'. Here the term practice is used in a narrow sense in connection with perception. Such a practice is a system of dispositions or habits that yield a conviction of which the output is constantly related to an input (153). We thus form certain convictions concerning our surroundings as output due to the input of sense perceptions. If such a doxastic practice is *socially* established (163), we can then take it to be reliable unless the opposite has been proved to be true (153, 168). It is rational to proceed with the formation of such beliefs on the basis of our sense perceptions because we are not faced with major inconsistencies and, moreover, there is no reason to think that they are unreliable. Also, we do not have alternative doxastic practices which we could prove in a non-circular way to be reliable (150, 168). It is therefore rational to assume perceptions to be reliable even if we do not have any proof of them. It is a question of *practical rationality*. This is how we operate with respect to the formation of our perceptions, of our memories, etc. We can never know if they are 100% reliable. In short, Alston makes use of the 'principle of credulity,' which states that we can proceed on the basis that something is reliable unless the opposite has proved to be the case (or a better alternative presents itself).

Do this practical rationality and this principle of credulity also obtain for the direct perception of God? Alston believes it does. Such perception is also a doxastic practice of which we can accept that it is reliable unless the opposite has proved to be the case. Such a 'practice' is indeed less established than sense perception but is nevertheless socially established, given the many testimonies about it, he argues (223). A direct perception of God can be thus seen as rationally reliable. Thus Alston states:

Let's take it, then, that [Christian mystical practice] is a functioning, socially established, perceptual doxastic practice with distinctive experiential inputs, distinctive input-output functions, a distinctive conceptual scheme, and a rich, internally justified override system. As such, it possesses a *prima facie* title to being rationally engaged in, and its outputs are thereby *prima facie* justified, provided we have no sufficient reason to regard it as *unreliable* or otherwise disqualified for rational acceptance. (225, cf. 194, 278f.)

The difference of this from an appeal to a self-authenticating experience is immediately clear. Alston is talking about an experience that is open to dispute, to objection.

What can refute faith? We are talking here, of course, not about empirical verification or falsification such as logical empiricism required of faith statements (210). Religion is not a scientific hypothesis and therefore does not need as such to be tested. As possible refutation, Alston points to inconsistencies both within the Christian faith as well as in relation to other practices. An example of the first is a so-called command from God to kill someone, something that conflicts with the ethics of Christian faith. An example of the second is a possible conflict between Christian faith and science or historical research. By refutation of Christian faith one can also think of explanations of religious experiences other than the theistic, such as the naturalistic explanation of religious experience through the classical criticism of religion found in Nietzsche, Marx and Freud.

The fact that there are different religions, each with a claim to truth, could also argue against one's own faith. From the epistemological perspective no religion can 'prove' that it is true. The adherents of the world religions are all, with respect to accounting for faith, in the same position. There are, indeed, examples of mutually conflicting truth claims. Hindus' view of evil and its consequences differs from that of Jews, Christians and Moslems. Belief in karma and reincarnation are different from belief in the Last Judgement. We should note here that the difference in insight concerning religious truth does not as such argue against one's own insight into religious truth, as Alston correctly maintains (274). The problem is that there are no criteria for deciding who is right. Faith statements are, on the one hand, made with an unconditional commitment, whereas, objectively, they have the character of fallible knowledge. I will come back to this (ch. 6.4).

Direct Perception Has an Objective Aspect

With this first step in his cumulative argument, Alston wants to argue that a direct perception of God is rationally tenable. He does not consider the possible refutations to be convincing. That is supported further by a second step: direct perception has an objective, factual aspect through which it can obtain as a foundation for faith.

Even though the reliability of perceptions cannot be demonstrated, this does not detract from the perception being objective. Alston specifies direct perception more closely and indicates that something presents itself and that the perception of this is essentially *non-conceptual*, not couched

in the concepts used by the subject. In that sense it can be said to be objective.

Even though the reliability of perceptions cannot be demonstrated, this does not detract from the fact that something or someone reveals it, or himself to us or that something or someone addresses us. He formulates it as follows: '... the perceptual experience the object presents itself ground simply by the fact that in that experience the object presents itself to the subject as so-and-so' (288). The objective character of the direct perception is non-conceptual. Alston emphasizes this in the following way: '... it seems clear that sensory experience essentially involves a presentation of objects to consciousness in a way that does not necessarily involve the application of general concepts to those objects ...' (38). This non-conceptual property of perception distinguishes it from, for example, just thinking about an object or remembering it or fantasizing about it. When that happens, one can speak of conceptualization and at the same time of an interpretation of and a judgement about the perception (38). I will comment on this non-conceptual and also non-interpretative character of perception in the following section (§3). I will state here only that Alston does not indicate an indisputable foundation for faith but does believe that he has indicated an objective, factual foundation. For the accounting for faith direct perception is an important link in the cumulative argument for faith. We will therefore turn now to Alston's third step.

2.2. The Cumulative Argument

Alston does not only use the principle of credulity with respect to accounting for faith. He wants, as stated, also to provide a positive reason for the practice of faith. This consists in giving a cumulative argument, of which direct perception with its objective character as presentation is an important link. Direct perceptions of God are based to some extent on background beliefs (100, 159-61, 188, 295). How could we otherwise identify that which we perceive as God (300)? We experience God also because of the fact that we stand in a faith tradition. The individual direct perceptions are imbedded in the socially rooted broad practice of the Christian faith. The doxastic practice in a narrower sense, such as that of perceptions and the accompanying beliefs, is part of the whole form of life or practice of the Christian faith. Broadly speaking, this consists of beliefs, affective faith attitudes and behaviour. It is not just a

direct perception of God but also learning to pray to God, to engage in liturgical practices, to see the world in the light of God (187).

If a direct perception is part of a whole doxastic practice, can we still speak of the *directness* of that perception? Are we then correct in speaking of the direct perception of God as something that is *prima facie* immediately justified? That was, after all, the requirement of a modest or minimal foundationalism. Alston holds that the fact that direct perception is always part of a whole way of life does not affect that perception's being direct (300-03). He pointed, after all, to the objective aspect of the perception (288).

The direct perception of God as an isolated given provides too little for the accounting for faith as a web of beliefs. That was also apparent from the example of Denise's accounting for faith — and not only epistemically because the reliability of the perception cannot be demonstrated. Neither is such a direct perception of God sufficient for the basis of faith. In a direct perception, the issue is often the personal relationship of faith with God, with what God intends personally for oneself. But faith concerns more, such as expectations for the future or God's action in history, etc. Believers obtain knowledge of this not through direct perception but through reading the Bible. We can thus see how direct perceptions are always part of the whole Christian form of life. Alston wants to take this into consideration in his accounting for faith. There is not only one basis for faith but several. Direct perception functions as an important link in a cumulative argument for the Christian faith (292-307):

Thus mystical perception can function as a source of justification for [Manifestation]-beliefs only against the background of a system of epistemically justified beliefs concerning the matters just mentioned Hence [mystical perception] depends on other grounds of religious belief for its viability as a source of epistemic justification. (295f.)

Alston distinguishes here between immediately justified beliefs (based on direct perceptions of God) and mediately justified beliefs. Examples of the latter are the hearing of prayer, the experience of leading a new life because of the work of the Holy Spirit or the witness of others (287, 291). They cannot, unlike the direct perception of God, be immediately justified because we attribute them only later to divine activity.

Alston thus develops his cumulative argument. We need, instead of one source, several sources for supporting faith and none of them is sufficient unto itself. Only because of their mutual support is there sufficient reason to see one's own beliefs to be true (300f.) The appeal to a direct

perception of God functions as a link in a cumulative argument. All the reasons together give sufficient reason to see a belief as true.

This proposal does raise a question. How should we view the relationship between direct perception as a ground and the other non-direct beliefs which have not originated through a direct perception? Alston connects his cumulative argument with his modest foundationalism. Foundationalism entails, as stated: 1) that there are a number of immediately justified beliefs; 2) that the justification of each indirectly justified belief must be converted to an immediately justified belief.¹⁰ Modest foundationalism modifies this in following way:

Note that this modest foundationalism is committed to the possibility, and the reality, of mutual epistemic support. Since some perceptual beliefs count as foundations that are *prima facie* justified by experience, they can provide support for beliefs that rest solely on other beliefs. (300)¹¹

The traditional requirement of one indisputable foundation, to which the indirectly justified beliefs are to be converted, is stretched to encompass mutual support, in which direct perceptions retain their place of privilege of being *prima facie* immediately justified but at the same time viewed as woven into the whole of the doxastic practice with its mediated justified beliefs.

Alston supplements this cumulative argument with a test of the whole. Just as a scientific theory is good for something, so is religion. We should thus ask if religion fulfils its function well. Therefore, reference to 'self-support' is an essential part of this (173f., 250-54). For the Christian faith, that means enjoying the fruits of the faith, the experience of a transformation in the direction of love. One knows the tree by its fruits. The ultimate test is to practice the Christian faith oneself (304).

Alston produces a well-thought out epistemic justification of faith, of which the theoretical aspects are explained extensively in his *Epistemic Justification*. I will limit myself to a few remarks in connection with the accounting for faith given above and begin by saying something general about the nature of giving account or justification.

In the Introduction to this volume I viewed accounting for faith as normative. People are obligated to use their rational ability responsibly. Instead of looking at justification deontologically — deontology is the doctrine of duty — Alston views it *evaluatively*. The deontological view emphasizes too much, according to him, the voluntary aspect of beliefs

(72f.).¹² The direct perception of God is not a matter of the will. The justification of a belief does not so much concern a duty as a value after which people strive, in Alston's view — and to strive after it as much as possible in order to separate true beliefs from false ones. Therefore, he calls his view of justification *evaluative*, for it is good for someone to have as strong a case as possible for believing something to be true.

Two approaches can be distinguished in accounting for faith. One can develop an argument for faith, like classical apologetics did, of which proofs of God's existence is a part. One justifies a belief by adducing aspects that can support it. Instead of such an *activity* of accounting for faith, one can also start with the *situation* of the believer and pose the question of whether he or she is justified in that belief. One then starts with the existing doxastic practice and poses the question of the extent to which it has epistemic justification (71). It was in that way that John Henry Newman produced his *Grammar of Assent* and Paul Tillich his transcendental explanation of the existing Christian faith. Alston also chooses this second approach. He starts with direct perceptions of God that a believer has and poses the question of whether this person is justified in his beliefs which are induced by such a perception. My own accounting for faith also starts from the experience of the believer (chs. 3-6).

Other than Tillich, Alston produces an accounting for faith in the *first person*. It has to do with someone who has had a direct perception of God. But is it meaningful for third parties who have not had such a direct perception? William James holds that such experiences have no authority over others. That seems incorrect. Given that these are reliable direct experiences, why should they not be meaningful for third parties? Is Moses' experience of God in the burning bush and the message that accompanied it not meaningful for others? And Jacob's wrestling with the stranger?

Jacob had deceived his brother Esau by robbing him of their father Isaac's blessing and then fled. After a long time he began the journey home and the moment would come when he had to face Esau. How would his brother react? It is shortly before this encounter that the wrestling scene occurs at night at the river Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-32). The narrator speaks reservedly about the person with whom Jacob wrestles. He describes him as 'a man.' Is Jacob wrestling in a dream with his brother Esau? The story gradually moves toward a revelation. Jacob receives

¹⁰ Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, 61

¹¹ Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, 42f.

¹² See also Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, ch. 4.

another name from the man and therewith another identity than that of another, for the name Jacob means 'deceiver.' He would no longer be deceiver, for you have struggled with God and with men, and Jacob but Israel. 'To Jacob's query as to the name of the man he you have overcome, 'The narrator remarks that receives the blessing for which he had asked, 'I have seen God face to face Jacob called the place Peniel, 'for (he said) 'and my life has been spared.'

We usually accept many things in life on the basis of the testimony of others or of eyewitnesses. Alston correctly argues that such a direct perception of God is also authoritative for others (281).

The Christian faith is first of all a *question of testimony*, which is direct for those who have had a direct experience of God, and indirect for those as accepting the testimony of others. Other than Alston, I will in Part II of this study start with the latter and describe the experience of the believer as a non-direct lasting experience.

Alston's view of religious experience and of the accounting for faith raises questions. He pays a great deal of attention to direct, momentary religious experiences, the perception of God, because he wants to stress its objective character: something or someone presents itself to us. This 'pure' perception occurs, according to him, without conceptualization or judgement (186). In my view, Alston is wrong on this point. Therefore I will say something in the next section about the question of whether (religious) experience is conceptually determined.

According to Alston's cumulative argument for the Christian faith, it is rational to accept the Christian faith as a form of life or practice. With this Alston criticizes implicitly Wittgenstein's view of language games or forms of life that, in the latter's view, have no justification. The practice is performed in the same way one plays a chess game, but playing the game as such cannot be justified. If this is correct, then it is only with difficulty that one can account for faith in the way Alston does. This accounting for faith is indeed intended primarily for those who are involved in it, as is apparent from the example of Denise, but it is also intended to account for faith to those of other faiths and worldviews as well. Does Alston succeed in this? He employs a practice-oriented rationality — how can he therefore avoid contextualism? For an answer to this I will look more closely at the rationality of the form of life or practice. Is it only an internal rationality or it also external (§4)?

3. Experience: Conceptual or Not?

In philosophical discussions on the experience of the great mystics, such as John of the Cross and others, a great deal of attention is paid to the question of the extent to which such experience is conceptually determined. Some hold that it is not conceptual, that it occurs without concepts. Others hold that religious experience is conceptually stamped. This question is very significant. The first view is often connected with the view that religions are essentially the same but differ with respect to their interpretation of this 'pure experience.' Every religion interprets this in its doctrine, rituals and ethics. The second view is often associated with the view that religions are not the same if we are talking about the experience of God by the adherents of a particular religion. According to W. Proudfoot and S.T. Katz, we are speaking of different mystical experiences. The experience of a Christian is different from that of a Buddhist.

Alston defends, as we saw, the view that the direct perception is initially non-conceptual. In this respect he belongs to the first group, but he does not associate this view with the view that all religions are essentially the same. Alston's position is unclear and shows also that he cannot deal with the direct perception in its initial state without a minimum of concepts. I will first discuss the opposite of Alston's position, i.e. that of Proudfoot, on experience as conceptually determined. That will clarify Alston's view which is a critique of Proudfoot's.

Proudfoot on Religious Experience

Proudfoot describes religious experience in his *Religious Experience* as a subjective feeling which can be explained. He points to the experiments of S. Schachter to explain how such an experience occurs. The person is in a vague state of mind, which he explains in a certain way.¹³ The same state of mind can be explained very differently by others, depending on their information. Schachter's experiments in which people were given stimulants are well known. The one group knew that they were being given these stimulants and did not view the experience as religious, whereas the other group did not have this information and saw the experience as religious. The state of mind was the same but the explanations

¹³ W. Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 99.

were given from a perspective outside the frame of mind itself. Proudfoot applies this theory to the Stephen Bradley's experience of conversion as described by James.¹⁴

Bradley attended a revival meeting and was impressed by the sermon on the book of Revelation. The same evening he had a religious experience. His heart rate increased, which Bradley ascribed to the work of the Holy Spirit. 'My heart seemed as if it would burst but it did not stop until I felt as if I was unutterably full of the love and grace of God.' Wondering about the meaning of this experience, it seemed 'as if the New Testament was placed open before me, eighth chapter of Romans, and as light as if some candle lighted was held for me to read the 26th and 27th verses of that chapter, and I read these words: "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities with groanings which cannot be uttered."' Bradley ended his story by challenging all deists and atheists in the world to shake his faith.

For a similar religious experience Proudfoot points to the Pentecost experience as described by Luke in Acts 2. Some explain it naturalistically as drunkenness, whereas Peter explains this special frame of mind by referring to the prophet Joel. The event is thus explained as religious by a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Proudfoot explains the physical agitation and the explanation of those involved. Bradley and Peter, in terms of Schachter's theory, 'Religious experience is something subjective, to which the believer adds an explanation. He does that in religious terms and only then does it become a religious experience, according to Proudfoot.¹⁵ He holds that experts in religious studies must describe religious experience first from the perspective of the believer himself, such as Bradley and the apostles. Otherwise, they do not do justice to the experience and become guilty of descriptive reductionism. They should subsequently look for a scientific explanation for these experiences. They have their own responsibility and do not need to seek approval for their explanation from the believers in question.¹⁶ They explain why the believer uses the particular concepts and beliefs to describe her experience:

If the concepts and beliefs under which the subject identifies his or her experience determine whether or not it is a religious experience, then we need to explain why the subject employs those particular concepts and beliefs. We must explain why the subject was confronted with this particular set of alternative ways of understanding his experience and why he

¹⁴ For this and the following see Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 102-05.
¹⁵ Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 223.
¹⁶ Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 195.

employed the one he did. In general, what we want is a historical or cultural explanation.¹⁷

Is Proudfoot justified in giving preference to a scientific explanation of religious experience above the believer's own theistic explanation? If believers claim that they have experienced God's salvation in Jesus Christ, should we trade the theistic explanation (from God in Christ) for an explanation that explains the experience culturally or historically? It cannot be denied that religious experiences are bound up with one's personal life history, with economic, social and political circumstances, but why should religious experiences not be explained in ways other than those that have to do with this world only? It is very suggestive that Proudfoot speaks here of an 'explanatory reduction'.¹⁸ Would, for example, aesthetic experiences be explained in the way that Proudfoot proposes for religious experiences? Works of art should then not be explained in terms of beauty but in terms of history or culture. If we take this route, then we deny the uniqueness of religious or aesthetic experiences. It is not clear that a historical or cultural explanation carries more weight in general than the believer's reference to God or the Holy Spirit. Historical or cultural explanations can supplement a theistic explanation. If Proudfoot is right, then the accounting for faith I propose in Part II is no longer a viable option. I will give a theistic explanation (ch. 6.3) for the claim made by people that they have experienced salvation in Christ. Alston did this as well in his explanation of the non-direct perception of God such as prayers being heard or someone's experience that her life has been renewed.

Proudfoot's analysis of religious experience into two parts appears to be wrongheaded. He starts with a subjective state of mind to which the subject adds an explanation. He deals with religious experience from the perspective of the subject-object scheme, in which both are separate from each other. On the one side is the subject with his state of mind and his explanatory apparatus, whereas on the other is the object that is given the role only of producing a certain state of mind in the subject. This does not do any justice to religious experience as a phenomenon. In the next chapter I will show that religious experience cannot be described from the perspective of the involvement of a subject with an object, let alone a subject that stands over against an object (ch. 3.2). Proudfoot sees the work of God as a part of the explanation that is given by the believer

¹⁷ Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 223.
¹⁸ Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 196-98.

afterwards. Thus one can speak only with difficulty, according to this model, of divine speaking or of a divine action in a religious experience.

Alston's Alternative

Does Alston provide a good alternative for this theory of religious experience? He concentrates, for his accounting for faith, on that which Proudfoot ignores, namely: that in a religious experience something or someone presents it- or himself. He writes:

Let me say a bit more about this relationship that from the side of the subject is called *direct awareness* and from the side of the object is called *presentation, givenness, or appearance*. It is a mode of cognition that is essentially independent of any conceptualization, belief, judgment, or any other application of general concepts to the object, though it typically exists in close connection with the latter. (37)

Instead of starting with a subjective state of mind, Alston starts with the fact that something or someone appears in someone's experience. What he adds here, however, should be contradicted. It concerns, he says in the above quote, 'a mode of cognition that is essentially independent of any conceptualization, belief, judgment or any other application of general concepts to the object.' Seeing something red is not the same as considering something to be red or construing or conceptualizing it as red (37).

Does this position also not presuppose the subject-object scheme, even though it moves in the other direction? Instead of beginning with the subject, as Proudfoot does, Alston begins with the object and wants to establish the objective aspect of the perception apart from our concepts or judgement. According to Alston, the non-conceptual, non-judgemental character of what appears or reveals itself in an sensory or mystical perception should be recognized (27f., 40). And that is important for his argument. The givenness of an object or a person to our religious experience is also the basis for certain beliefs concerning God. The following quote on sense perception also obtains for the perception of God:

... at the heart of perception ... is a direct awareness of something's appearing to one as so-and-so. This fact of X's appearing to S as ϕ is, in principle, independent of any conceptualization or judgment, independent of S's taking X to be ϕ or believing or judging X to be ϕ , or even thinking of X as ϕ . Sensory appearance is a more rudimentary constituent of the total phenomenon of perception than anything involving judgment. Adult perception is typically shot through with conceptualization and belief, but that is a further development; it goes beyond the minimal requirement for their being a case of perception. (186f.)

Alston correctly emphasizes that something or someone presents itself in the experience as perception, but why must this be viewed as non-conceptual? Alston seems, as stated, on this point to belong among those who claim to be able to indicate a culturally neutral, universal essence of religion entirely free of concepts.

This view entails that the experiences of mystics are the same but that the interpretation of them are determined by culture and religion. Thus they use the available symbols of their religious milieu to describe their experience. Katz calls this a form of 'essentialist reductionism' that reduces interpretations of x to a posited essence y. The latter is not open to refutation. We see this in R. Otto, F. Heiler and E. Underhill and it goes back, according to some, to Schleiermacher.¹⁹

A culturally-neutral essence can be viewed in the following way as well. There are different mystical experiences which can be categorized in types that transcend cultural boundaries. Although the language of the mystic in which he describes his experience is culturally bound, his experience is not. We find this view in R. Zaehner, W.T. Stace and N. Smart. They provide a cross-cultural categorization of mystical experiences.²⁰

If we take another look at the above quote from Alston, his position proves nevertheless to differ from those who argue for a culturally neutral essence of religious experience. He does not deny that someone's conceptual scheme and beliefs can influence the way in which an object presents itself to the subject. My house presents itself to me differently from when I first saw it. We hear a piece of music the second or third time differently from how we heard it the first time. Therefore, Alston holds that he does not need to choose a position in the debate as to whether there is culturally neutral common essence to experience (39, note 29). But he does in fact choose.

In the above quote Alston attempts to avoid choosing by making an artificial distinction between less developed perceptions and adult perceptions (187). That does not seem tenable, because the less developed 'perception' is actually not a perception at all but a vague sense that something is present. In addition, the distinction between what 'happens' and the 'experience' of it is blurred. The first is a matter of causation, whereas the second refers to the experience in its phenomenological significance.

¹⁹ I have critiqued this last point. See W. Stoker, 'Religion als Ausdruck des gesamtmenntlichen Gefühls: Schleiermachers Sicht der religiösen Erfahrung in den *Reden*', 79-104.

²⁰ See S.T. Katz, 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', 24. For the sake of completeness, allow me to remark that Katz points to yet another variant: not only are the experiences the same but the descriptions are similar as well (23). For a defense of 'pure consciousness' see R.K.C. Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*.

which, according to Alston, is conceptually determined in its adult, developed form.

Viewed from this angle, Alston does in fact choose and argues for a middle position. An immediate perception of God is initially non-conceptual but as an adult perception it is, in his view, conceptually determined. This choice has the actual consequence that he does choose the position that experience is conceptually determined: he argues that there are as many mystical experiences as there are different conceptual schemes for grasping Ultimate Reality' (189).

In my view, the possibility of non-conceptual experience does exist. The aesthetic experience is, according to Kant, non-conceptual. Taste is not a matter of the intellect but of feeling.²¹ Zen meditation as well has to do with pure experience. Alston, however, is talking about a different kind of experience. His starting point is always sense experience which, according to him, is in some ways similar to religious perception. Alston's middle position is unclear, because a vague sense that something is present cannot be called a perception or an experience. Something that appears to me in a flash is, as such, not yet an experience. Moreover, as a consequence of the subject-object scheme he presupposes, Alston incorrectly sees the conceptual element as something added from outside to the perception.

I share Alston's concern that too much stress on conceptualization can stand in the way of that which experience has to offer. We can get further by posing the question as to what function precisely the conceptual element fills. Is it an *explanation* of a certain experience of which Proudfoot gives an example or an *identification* of something that presents itself?

Identification instead of Explanation

The distinction between identifying something and explaining it can bring some clarity. Those who consider religious experience to be conceptualized are right in that identification plays a role in every perception. With Alston one can view religious experience as the direct givenness of the object with conceptualization and judgement occurring afterwards. Or one can, with Proudfoot, view religious experience as a subjective feeling with an explanation that occurs afterward. In both cases there is a

²¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §6.

failure to recognize that there is always a moment of identification in experience. Neither does justice to the fact that identification of that which is perceived belongs to the experience or perception. This can be called interpretation on the pre-theoretical level of everyday life.

The element of interpretation is already present in the initial moment of the experience. In everyday life as well we interpret on a pre-theoretical level, usually without stopping to think about what we are doing. We can name objects like a hammer or a fork because we recognize them and can thus identify them as this or that. That is possible because we have become familiar with them in our lives. People from other cultures who are not familiar with objects such as hammers or forks would have difficulty identifying them as such.

Heidegger explains this by viewing understanding (*Verstehen*) as an existential. The human being is a *hermeneutical being*. Our dealing with the world unfolds in a pre-theoretical understanding through which the things in the world receive their meaning. The child learns that a hammer exists to hit nails, that he can burn himself on a stove, and also learns to recognize certain metal objects as spoons or forks. The something-as-something structure is not a matter here of *theoretical explanation* but of *identification*, which entails a pre-theoretical interpretation. For example, religious experiences of God's grace, majesty or justice are, for those who experience them in this way, not deductions or (theoretical) interpretations afterwards but they *experience* them as God's actions towards them or others. They experience God as gracious, majestic or just.

Alston is inconsistent in the following quote when he describes what a perception is:

... what perception *is* is the awareness of something's appearing to one as *such-and-such*, where this is a basic, unanalyzable relationship, not reducible to conceptualizing an object as such-and-such, or to judging or believing the object to be such-and-such. (5)

Here the moment of identification, in fact, is presupposed in what is called a 'basic unanalyzable relationship': something appears at least, according to Alston, as *such-and-such* — and this entails conceptualization. In numerous passages it appears that Alston cannot escape using concepts to identify something as something (98, 186f., 93f.). There is, contrary to what he says, a minimal conceptualization with respect to perception.²²

²² See also R. van Woudenberg, 'Alston on Direct Perception and Interpretation,' 117-

I share Alston's motivation for stressing the objective moment in experience. A possible consequence of the view of conceptually determined experience is that what experience has to offer never emerges. That happens in J. Runzo, who emphasizes conceptualization so strongly that this experience is that what experience perceives something but also what we are determines not only how we perceive something but also what we are aware of (39, nt. 29). In Part II of this study I will seek another solution from the perspective of phenomenology for this problem and refer to the objective aspect in experience as the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience (ch. 3.2).

4. No Practice-Relative Rationality and Truth

Alston shares the current view of religion as a web. Beliefs do not exist in isolation but function within a whole, a web of beliefs, rituals and in ethics. He refers for this to Wittgenstein's language games or forms of life. Whereas a game of chess has internal rules for judging the legality of different moves, we do not have any rule for judging the game of chess as such. Wittgenstein proposes a limit to the justification which is found within the language game or practice itself. That is called contextualism, because justification can occur only internally. There are as many rationalities as there are practices. Rationality is thus only a matter of the practice in question. In other words, it is practice-relative. The question that presents itself immediately is whether contextualism is the necessary consequence of the web view of religion. If practice-oriented rationality converges with contextualism, then it is practice-relative. That entails fideism with respect to the accounting for faith, i.e. that faith can be accounted for only within one's own community and cannot be accounted for with respect to those who belong to different communities.

We will see that a practice-oriented rationality does not converge with contextualism. For that I will first look at different models of rationality that are used in the accounting for faith. We will then look at the position of contextualism and Alston's commentary on it.

Formal and Practice-Oriented Rationality

In the Introduction to this volume I distinguished between the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism and practice-oriented views of rationality. The former is a formal view of rationality, also called evi-

denialism because of the requirement that a belief is rational only when there are arguments given for it. The mediate justification must be converted into immediate justification, to propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible or indisputable. Faith should be absolutely certain. *Rationality thus converges with truth*. An example of this was Locke's proof of God's existence (Introduction, §1). If there are valid reasons for a belief, then the belief is also true and one can be absolutely certain of it. *Practice-oriented views of rationality* hold that rationality is always associated with a certain practice, such as that of science, art, religion or everyday life. Such a practice has its own criteria for rationality. If an explanation for this is given, then people are required to look into such a practice with respect to its content.²³ To justify something is therefore no longer a matter of following rules and thereby converting beliefs that can be justified only mediately to immediately justified beliefs. Within the practice-oriented view of rationality there are different views of rationality such as *social evidentialism*, *presumptionism* and *contextualism*.

Social evidentialism holds, with the evidentialism of classical foundationalism, that one must first have reasons before accepting a belief as rational. The reasons, however, no longer consist in directly justified beliefs but in the judgement of the community of experts. Foundationalism is passé. The requirement is made that a belief is rationally acceptable if that belief is held on the basis of an expert judgement. This evidentialism is called social because beliefs must be tested by a community of experts. Brown has developed this model of rationality.²⁴

Like social evidentialism, *presumptionism* rejects classical foundationalism but also rejects evidentialism. The requirement of the latter to give reasons first for a belief is at right angles to everyday life, in which we often accept things in good faith without first asking for reasons to do so. Presumptionism bases itself on the principle of rational acceptance or the principle of presumption, which entails that statements can be accepted as credible without first giving reasons for them. The principle of presumption is as follows: 'it is rational to accept a belief unless there are good reasons to cease from thinking that it is true.'²⁵ That is how we usually act in everyday life. And that obtains also for faith. We encountered

²³ Stenmark, *Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life*, 116.

²⁴ Brown, *Rationality*, 196f., ch. 5.

²⁵ So Stenmark formulates the principle of rational acceptance. *Rationality*, 212. There is also another variant of this principle: 'it is rational to accept a belief only if there are no good reasons not to do so and there is no rival belief one would be better off believing' (275). In Part II of this study I will hold to the former and point out where the second is of importance.

this principle already as the 'principle of credulity' which Alston also used for accepting perceptions. According to presumptionism, reasons can be given for a belief, but it is not a prerequisite for seeing a belief as rational. If necessary, positive reasons can be given afterwards for a belief; as Alston does in his cumulative argument.

Alston's 'practical rationality' combines the use of the principle of belief with a modest form of foundationalism. He sides with foundationalism with respect to a direct perception of God is in principle open to *prima facie* because a direct perception is a mixture of immediate, direct and mediated, indirect justification(s). Aside from the direct perception of God, he also points to non-direct religious experiences that can be justified only indirectly. For such an indirect justification one can adduce only reasons that lie outside but are still connected directly to it, such as the belief that one's prayer has been heard or that the Holy Spirit has changed one's life.

Contextualism

Before looking at Alston's critique of contextualism I will first explore this variant of a practice-oriented form of rationality. Variants of contextualism are to be found in Wittgenstein and his pupils N. Malcolm and P. Winch. It is also to be found in a certain sense in the Barthian school of theology at Yale, i.e. H. Frei, G.A. Lindbeck, R. Thiemann, W.C. Placher and others.²⁶

According to contextualism, rationality is not only connected with a practice but also determined by it. *Rationality is practice-relative*. We should recall that I also used the term practice as an umbrella term for context, form of life, language game and normative framework (§1). The abandonment of the formal view of rationality entailed the absence of any universal rationality, leaving only a rationality, according to contextualism, determined by a practice. In this respect contextualism is the opposite of classical foundationalism, which claimed universal validity. For contextualism, the only function of giving reasons is to clarify faith. Reasons are valid only within the context of faith. One cannot as such

judge a practice like a worldview or religion. Worldviews and religions have, in addition, their own view of reality and truth, which differs from other practices. In this connection one often hears of the *autonomy of the practice*. What precisely does this mean?

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein rejects classical foundationalism. Propositions such as 'This is my hand' or 'The earth has existed for years' or 'There are people in the room' are basic propositions of a certain practice. There is no external justification for them. Nor is that necessary, even though they are not indisputable. Let us recall that Alston, with respect to sense perceptions like 'This is my hand,' indicated that that they could not be epistemically justified (§2). According to Wittgenstein, this is our starting point. The acceptance of such basic propositions is determined by participation in one or another practice. If one disputes them, the whole practice is placed in question. They are determinative for participation in practices. We cannot even say that we are certain of such propositions. By accepting them as 'anchors' of the practice we are able to justify or refute other less fundamental propositions. We cannot make any further assessment of the anchors themselves, for they have no further justification. They have meaning only within the practice.

How do we arrive then at the choice to participate in a certain practice? Such a choice is, according to Wittgenstein, practical, not theoretical, as Alston indicates: 'It would be a choice as to what sort of activity to engage in, not a choice as to whether some proposition is true or false. The foundation of the language game is action, not intuition, belief, or reasoning' (154). The question of whether a certain practice is a reliable source of beliefs is, according to Wittgenstein, *not a meaningful one*, for there is no rational justification for such a practice. *We cannot give any reason for our commitment to and involvement in a practice*. Nor is that a problem, for the language game is already being played. That is part of life. And in this Wittgenstein is unmistakably correct if we look at the examples he gives above. They are drawn from everyday life and we cannot give them up — otherwise life would cease. Wittgenstein solves this by seeing such propositions as fundamental propositions of a practice which cannot be given any further foundation.

My concern is the claim that what is said about the 'language game' of sense perception also obtains for other practices such as religion. Belief in God is, in the practice of faith, a fundamental proposition, an 'absolute judgement of value,' according to Phillips.²⁷ It is a basic belief for which

²⁶ Instead of the term 'Wittgensteinian fideism' I will use the more neutral term contextualism, as Stenmark does (*Rationality*, ch. 11). D.Z. Phillips, who is often viewed as *Hermeneutics of Contemplation*, 25-30).

²⁷ D.Z. Phillips, 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games,' 123f., 130.

one has no reasons. That is how it goes in everyday life as well as when we accept certain things without demanding reasons for them. We trust our perception or our memory that there is a tree in that place. It is rational to do so, even if we discover later that our memory was wrong or that our perception was mistaken. In that respect this agrees with the principle of presumption. Contextualism differs from presumptionism in that it speaks of fundamental propositions for which no further justification can be given, because we cannot step outside the language game or the practice.

The contextualism of Wittgenstein and Winch holds, moreover, that the basic beliefs of a religion are also the framework in which questions of correct or incorrect, true or false can be posed. The truth or falsity of our beliefs can thus be discussed only within the practice or language game. The believer and the atheist do not interpret the same world in different ways but see *different worlds*. The language game or practice determines what truth or reality is. Not only rationality but also *truth is practice-relative*. Thus a heavy accent is placed on language and the conceptual determination of perception and experience.

In the previous section I distinguished between identification and explanation (theoretical interpretation). Here it is clearly the latter. The language that is spoken determines what reality is for him or her.²⁸ How, for example, does someone with a different worldview see human beings and the world? According to contextualism, everybody wears differently coloured sunglasses. They thus perceive the world differently. Their religious language colours their world, so that it seems as if people with different worldviews inhabit different worlds. To use Wittgenstein's illustration, a certain person sees his sickness as a punishment from God. Someone else with a secular worldview does not share that belief. He has an entirely different view of sickness and looks at it in line with his worldview simply as a biological process. His view does not deny the other, so Wittgenstein argues, but it is simply another way of looking at sickness.²⁹ The two views of sickness can therefore not be compared with each other. Are we not faced here with the danger that we are perceived as living on isolated islands, each with his or her own rationality and truth? Alston also states that in contextualism the concept of something like truth or falsity that transcends or connects language games is ruled out (154).

²⁸ P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Society*, 15.
²⁹ Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, 55.

Contextualism is critiqued for leading to relativism.³⁰ But that is not necessarily the case. For the Barthian school of Hans Frei, for example, it does not obtain because this school argues that God's reality is the norm for all reality. The Christian faith is not just one practice among others but should be *the* practice of all. Context thus becomes a text that includes the whole of reality.

Phillips wants to avoid relativism as well, remarking that the religious believer should not live in different worlds that clash with one another. If a religious belief is in conflict with the facts of natural science, one cannot resolve that tension by appealing to the authority of religion. What one sees as true with respect to natural science and how the same person as believer sees reality as the creation of God should not conflict.³¹

In summary, contextualism claims the following with respect to rationality and the truth of religions and worldviews:

1. These are autonomous practices, each with its own standard of rationality. The basic beliefs provide the criteria for this.
2. Practices do not only have their own standard of rationality but also their own truth and view of reality. Truth is practice-relative.
3. The question of whether it is rational to have a certain religion or worldview cannot be posed, because there is no rationality external to the practice. Rationality is practice-relative. For the accounting for faith this entails *fideism*. The basic beliefs are groundless. *We cannot give any reasons for our commitments*.

Human existence is historically determined and therefore we cannot do otherwise than begin with a certain context, a certain practice. Alston does that, as we saw. There is no 'God's eye point of view,' no universal standard by which everything can be judged. *The notion of universal reason and formal evidentialism have become untenable*. Practice-oriented rationality has taken its place.

When I give my proposal for accounting for faith in Part II (chs. 3-6) my starting point will be how faith is actually practiced, the context. The problem with this is how to account for faith in a way that both recognizes the contextual character of faith and at the same time transcends its own boundaries, if it wants to be able to explain the Christian faith to those of other faiths as well and make the Christian faith open to critical discussion. In this I acknowledge, with contextualism, that practices have

³⁰ Brown, *Rationality*, 113-33; R. Trigg, *Reason and Commitment*, ch. 1.

³¹ Phillips, 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games,' 135-37; Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*, 25-30.

their standards for rationality. Rationality is practice-dependent, but that is not the same as being practice-relative — rationality also transcends its practice-relativity. One should avoid contextualism with its practice-relative rationality. Alston's accounting for faith attempts that, which is why his critique of contextualism is of significance for us.

Alston's Critique

Alston remarks with respect to Wittgenstein's examples of the reliability of sensory perception:

... I can understand perfectly well the propositions that *sense perception is (is not) reliable*, that *physical objects do (do not) exist*, and that *the earth has (has not) been in existence for more than a year*, whether or not I or anyone else has any idea of how to determine whether one of these propositions is true. (155)

Unlike contextualism, he does not view language games or practices ontologically or metaphysically but only epistemologically. Practices are sources of criteria for justification and rationality but do not have their own view of truth and reality and therefore do not have their own world. His 'strong realism' entails that *truth* transcends particular practices:

My theory of doxastic practices is firmly realistic, recognizing a single reality that is what it is, regardless of how we think or talk about it. The doxastic practice is a source of criteria of justification and rationality, it does not determine truth or reality. In other words, for me doxastic practices are crucial epistemologically, not metaphysically. (165, n. 37)

Contra contextualism, Alston holds therefore that the question of whether a given practice is as such a reliable source of true beliefs is a valid one, just as the related question of whether it is rationally justified to assent to a practice like the Christian faith (155). The principle of credulity obtains not only within a practice but can be applied to the practice as such and is therefore not practice-relative. It is a question of *universal rationality* that transcends the boundaries of a practice. It is rational to participate in the Christian practice (form of life), even though that is no guarantee of its truth, because it is always open to refutation (175-83).

At the conclusion of my proposal for accounting for faith I will engage in a more extensive critique of contextualism (ch. 6.2.2). Here Alston's critique will suffice. I share his critique but have a different view of realism. According to Alston's *strong realism*, there is truth and reality regardless of the position of the human being as a knowing subject. Is this

realism not gratuitous, given that Alston rejects every kind of absolute knowledge and argues that we can never claim to have the truth or know reality? Contrary to that, I will defend a *relational realism* which views knowledge as an interplay between subject and object. We claim to say something true about reality in general with our propositions and with our worldview propositions to say something about what reality truly is. The validity of such claims goes beyond one's own circle. Relational realism differs from strong realism in that it recognizes that our propositions are always stated from the perspective of a certain practice and are thus context-dependent, which is something different from being determined entirely by that context. Unlike contextualism, relational realism does not make contextually bound claims about reality. Relational realism is concerned with what truly exists but acknowledges that this occurs by means of the concepts and schemes employed.³²

5. Concluding Remarks

Alston gives a cumulative argument for the Christian faith. In this respect he displays similarities with Basil Mitchell's accounting for faith in *The Justification of Religious Belief* (1973). This is also a cumulative argument. Mitchell starts with the position that theism cannot be proven through the proofs of God's existence but neither can secular critics demonstrate that theism is incoherent. Instead of giving proofs for God's existence, he develops a cumulative argument that consists in taking together a number of reasons for justifying theism. Different arguments for faith point continually in the same direction, to theism. They thus reinforce one another in supporting theism, without the cumulative argument having the compelling logical cogency that classical foundationalism required. That is how we operate in many areas of life and so does Mitchell in his accounting for faith. In Alston's argument the direct perception of God with its objective character as presentation is an important link. Next to this, the believer can advance other grounds, such as a prayer being heard, the experience of leading a new life through the Holy Spirit, the testimony of others, etc. Because of their mutual support, there is sufficient reason to see one's own faith as true.

³² What I here call relational realism L. van den Brom calls (theological) relationalism in distinction from realism and idealism. L.J. van den Brom, *Creedne Twijfel* [Creative Doubt], 1990, 31f.

The importance of Alston's argument is, among other things, that it breaks with the strategy of immunization, which was invoked by Tillich. A perception of God can, in principle, be refuted. His 'practical rationality' uses the principle of credulity that transcends one's own context or practice.

Alston's accounting for faith thus takes up both challenges cited in the introduction to this volume. In this the direct perception of God receives all the attention, although he does not deny lasting experiences:

Our concentration on putative direct awareness of God should not be taken in any way as a derogation of other forms of religious experience It is worth stressing that the general experience of the presence and activity of God in one's life, the more or less constant and pervasive sense that God's providence is shaping the pattern of one's life, that God is guiding, sustaining and directing one, can be of enormous religious importance, and may well contribute something to the grounds of one's religious beliefs ... (35)

Nevertheless, he pays attention, one might say, only to that part of Gauguin's painting that depicts Jacob's wrestling with the stranger.

Because of its use of a practical view of rationality, this accounting for faith is open for other worldviews and religions. Epistemologically, they are, like one's own religion, in the same position: one can give reasons for one's own religion but never prove its truth. In a practice-oriented rationality *rationality and truth no longer converge*. Alston emphasizes strongly that religious experience is not self-evident but open to refutation. By rejecting contextualism, this does not constitute any barrier to engaging in a dialogue of mutual assessment and critique with other religions and worldviews.

I therefore do not agree with Barger who holds that Alston does resort to an immunization of faith. For support, he points to Alston's use of the principle of credulity, which, according to him, entails that the burden of proof rests on the skeptic.³³ Indeed, the burden of proof does shift in comparison with evidentialism, which, after all, required that something can be accepted only on the basis of adequate reasons. The principle of credulity, however, seems to be more in agreement with the way in which we see our beliefs as rational in everyday life. In addition, this principle does not exclude there being positive reasons for a belief. Alston does that in his cumulative argument. Barger argues that Alston cannot compel the non-theist to accept beliefs that are based on religious experience as

rationally justified.³⁴ If he means here that reasons advanced are not strong enough to compel others to assent to the belief connected with them, he is right. No religion can supply such reasons. If he means, however, that the non-theist cannot, in principle, appreciate the rationality of the belief, he is wrong. One should keep in mind the difference between understanding the reasons for a belief and assenting to the belief itself.

Alston's accounting for faith is important also because it starts from the Christian faith as practice and thereby views rationality as practice-oriented. In a practice-oriented rationality justification is constantly dependent on the practice in question. Justification or giving account is thus *determined by the situation*. A practice like science is therefore to be justified in a different way from a practice like religion. The possible refutation of reasons should exist in connection with the purpose of the practice in question. And the purposes for science and for religion differ. The reductionistic criticism of religion, which views religion as a (failed) scientific theory to explain the world (Taylor and Frazer), as a purely psychological phenomenon (Marett and Freud) or as a social phenomenon (Dukheim and Marx), always refers only to a certain aspect of religion. Thus, such views do not take account of the uniqueness of this specific practice, religion. Criticism is valid when religions do not fulfill their own goals or when they do not realize the unique intention of religion to provide salvation. Religion can also be dangerous.

Even though Alston's accounting for faith gives rise to thought, it is, nevertheless, too limited. This is so, first of all, because of his concentration on the direct perception of God, to which some readers, even if they consider themselves to be believers, will respond: 'I have never had such an experience.' Alston does acknowledge other grounds which have to do with lasting experiences but does not explore them further. The majority of (more or less) believers would find it easier to follow his argument if he started with non-direct, lasting experiences. Therefore, these experiences will be the starting point of my proposal for accounting for faith.

A second objection has to do more with content and concerns the non-conceptual 'initial' perception (§3). As we saw, Alston does not succeed in arguing for a minimal conceptually determined experience.

Furthermore, it is not wrong but indeed one-sided to characterize religious experience as perception. The Eastern Orthodox churches emphasize religious perception as well in a visual theology that makes the icon

³³ Barger, 'The Miracle of Minimal Foundationalism: Religious Experience and Justified Belief,' 303.

³⁴ Barger, 'Miracle,' 312.

central. The religious experience that people have when viewing an icon is also seen as 'non-conceptual'³⁵ but for a different reason than Alston gives. Here it is a symbolic, non-direct perception of the icon in its reference to God as light and beauty.³⁶ That brings me to Alston's comparison between religious and sense perception.

Even though Alston sees differences between religious perception and sense perception, one can object to his comparison of both that it does not do justice to what is unique about religious perception or experience. By not exploring the symbolic nature of religious perception, Alston misses what is unique about religious perception. If we take that into consideration, then the difference between religious and sense perception is greater than Alston indicates.

Epistemology, Hermeneutics and the Theory of Affectivity

With respect to Alston's epistemological accounting for faith, one can ask whether his starting point is not too limited for such a task. I would like to supplement it with hermeneutics and the theory of affectivity.

As far as the accounting for faith is concerned, epistemology cannot suffice. It is one-sided to limit religious experience to its initiation, to what Alston calls the presentation, God's revelation of himself. If we inquire into the meaning of the beliefs associated with this, then we are dealing with explanation, interpretation — thus hermeneutics. For that reason in accounting for faith we need to supplement epistemology with hermeneutics. That is already implicit in Alston's cumulative argument. In giving a cumulative argument, Denise told her *story of faith*. In Part II of this study we will see that religious experience is primarily narrative experience and that the content of faith is primarily narrative in nature.

An accounting for faith that starts from faith as practice should give a thick description of faith by going into the content of such a practice. It is undeniable that believers perceive the world and people with the 'eyes of faith,' but then I am talking primarily about lasting, non-direct experience. Such an experience can be described if we begin with 'hearing' instead of 'seeing.' For many believers seeing comes after hearing the Word.

In accounting for faith epistemology should be supplemented not only by hermeneutics but also by the theory of affectivity. The question of whether it is rational to have a belief cannot be answered solely on epistemological and hermeneutical grounds. Faith is a matter that involves the whole person, including her mood and emotions. Agreeing with a testimony to Transcendence is also affective. Does that make faith irrational? One must ask in accounting for faith how mood and emotion are related to the rational aspect of assent.

Transition

In the first part of this study we looked at two types of accounting for faith. Both arrived, via different routes, at an objective aspect in religious experience. According to Tillich, not only do people have a sense of God, of which they are immediately certain, but also the Christian faith as such, as being grasped by New Being, is self-evident. According to Alston, religious experience is not self-evident. As a direct perception of God, religious experience can be refuted and therefore discussed. The positive reason to believe is that the direct perception of God is essentially objective because it concerns a presentation of God.

In the discussion of both types it emerged that the view of rationality has shifted from the formal rationality of classical foundationalism to a practice-oriented rationality. In Part II I will make use of the latter in its presumptivist variant. This view of rationality fits with the way in which we handle rationality in everyday life. It uses the principle of presumption: it is rational to accept something unless there are good reasons to stop believing that it is right. At the same time I will give a positive reason for faith.

Rationality and truth no longer converge now that the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism has ceased to be an option. That can be viewed as a loss in that the giving of reasons no longer means that faith defended in that way can be demonstrated as true to those of other faiths and worldviews as well. Refutation is always possible. One can acknowledge the rationality of another belief without assenting to it.

In classical foundationalism rationality and truth are equivalent. If one has reasons for his belief, then one has demonstrated the truth of one's own belief and is absolutely certain of his belief. Now that classical foundationalism is no longer endorsed, rationality and truth are now separate from each other. Rationality is no longer the guarantor of truth. *In this*

³⁵ P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, 4.

³⁶ Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 166f.

respect rationality' has been weakened. We can have good reasons for something but that does not yet make us certain of the truth of our belief. Stated positively, requirements of rationality are no longer formulated abstractly and ahistorically but more in line with human standards. We miss the 'full sunshine' that classical foundationalism claimed to be able to give.

In a practice-oriented rationality reasons are not objective in the sense classical foundationalism defined objectivity: objective in the sense of being indisputable and absolutely certain — thus, objective in the strong sense. It is possible to give objective reasons in the weak sense. Alston does that: experience has something to offer because something or someone presents it- or himself. It is objective in the weak sense, because it is always open to refutation. We can provide reasons which have led us in a matter like faith to a certain belief in the light of the information available to us.

The accounting for faith which follows starts primarily with the non-direct lasting experience of the believer. Is a believer who lives his life primarily on the basis of such a lasting experience rational in his belief?

A Hermeneutical-Phenomenological Accounting for Faith

PART II

3. THE TESTIMONY TO TRANSCENDENCE

The absolute shows itself. In this shortcut of the absolute and its presence is constituted an experience of the absolute. It is only about this that testimony testifies.

Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 144

... the whole value of the hermeneutical experience ... seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not simply ordering knowledge in compartments, but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us. Understanding then [is, rather,] a genuine experience, ie an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth.

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 445

1 Introduction

Objections to the transcendental and the epistemological accountings for faith remain. That is why I will now argue for a hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith that begins with the experience of the believer. Religious experience is not something that exists or occurs in isolation. It is stamped by religion and even more broadly by culture. If, in reference to the Christian faith, our starting point is that God does act in history, as the writings of the Old and New Testaments testify about him, then the Christian faith can be characterized essentially as *witness or testimony to Transcendence*. According to W. Brueggemann, testimony is the broadest category to use in reference to how Israel speaks of God¹ and that obtains also for the New Testament.

The testimony to transcendence or to God is the context within which I will speak about religious experience. The term 'transcendence' is the nominal form of the adjective 'transcendent,' of which one of the meanings given by the Oxford Concise Dictionary is 'transcending human experience.' The verbal form means 'to go beyond or surpass.' As an independent noun, it can also mean that which has the state or quality of being transcendent. I am using the term Transcendence in the latter sense. Here it refers to God, in the sense that he is confessed to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of Jesus Christ.

¹ W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 119.

The theology of experience sometimes gives the mistaken impression that it is concerned with experience as a source of faith. This is incorrect. The event on which the Christian faith is based cannot be deduced from experience but is a matter of history. Experience is not the source from which the content of the Christian faith is drawn but the medium through which we receive the faith. By placing experience within the context of the testimony to transcendence, we avoid the misunderstanding that we are dealing with experience as a source of faith. Experiences are like lungs that inhale God's breath.

As the manifestation and proclamation of Transcendence, revelation is the source of religious experience in the Christian tradition. Viewed as testimony to Transcendence, faith thus has two poles: the manifestation or proclamation of Transcendence on the one side and, on the other, the human being as a witness to that which he has seen or heard.

The primary fact is that God has acted in history, which sometimes includes an immediate manifestation of God to the patriarchs, Moses, the prophets, Mary, Jesus, the apostles, etc. The testimony to such a direct experience develops into the mediated experience, the lasting experience.² Thus Israel tells of its experiences through the lens of its memory of the Exodus and the apostles tell of theirs through the lens of Jesus' resurrection. Religion thus has the character of being an answer. A human being witnesses or testifies to what has happened to him. He or she thus has the *status of a witness*. This obtains both for the first witnesses as well as for believers today who have received the testimony through tradition or have themselves been witnesses of a direct experience of Transcendence. The sermon on Jacob's wrestling with a stranger, in which the Breton women in Gauguin's painting have just heard, can influence their lasting experience or make them receptive for a direct experience similar to Jacob's.

Human beings appear to be dependent on signs or traces. Of course, these signs and traces are not just those that have come to us from the distant past, but even today human beings have experiences that transcend them. In both cases, whether people are directed to testimonies from the past or have experiences of the Transcendent themselves, people are witnesses to Transcendence. *There is no other access to the truth of the Christian faith than through testimony*. That was problematic for classical foundationalism with its requirement of indisputable knowledge, but it is not so for a practice-oriented view of rationality.

If human beings have the status of being witnesses, then we no longer need to look for a supposedly immediate sense of God. In the current situation in Western culture it is not very convincing to proceed on the basis of an *a priori* awareness of God, as Tillich did. The knowledge of God comes to us primarily *ex auditu Verbi*, comes to us via hearing the Word of the first witnesses. It is therefore a matter of interpretation. The history of the interpretation of God's acts begins already in Scripture itself. Simeon witnesses in the temple when he takes the child Jesus into his arms: 'For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people' (Luke 2:30-31 NIV). What follows in this gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles shows how this takes shape and the question of how the events were understood is constantly raised.

By briefly listing the following points I will indicate the shape of a hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for the faith. I will elaborate on these points further in this and the following chapters. This type of accounting for faith is centered on the following aspects:

1. The Christian faith is referred to experience. Faith that is not nourished by experience dies. Therefore this accounting for faith begins with experience, as Tillich and Alston do. Starting with the experience of the believer is not intended here in an individualistic sense but should be understood in terms of the fact that the believer is part of the Christian faith community. Accounting for faith is therefore accounting for the faith of the church.

2. Christian faith in God is no longer an obvious choice in Western society. We live in a pluralistic culture with people who belong to different religions and secular worldviews. Therefore the claim of transcendental accounting for faith that religion is part of human nature is no longer convincing. The pluralistic situation proves otherwise: in contemporary Western society some choose a secular worldview deliberately. Everyone has a worldview, but not everyone has a religion. I will argue for a worldview *a priori* (§5.1).

3. The starting point of this accounting for faith is not abstract theological propositions but the social *appearance* or *phenomenon* of the Christian faith community. The starting point is the everyday religious experience of believers who, in one way or another, experience religious Transcendence in the liturgy, in the rituals of baptism or the Eucharist, in Bible stories, prayer, songs or sermons and in the faith praxis of everyday.

² Brueggemann, *Theology*, 568-70.

This approach is not only phenomenological because it starts with the phenomenon of people who believe but also because in the rest of this book religious experience is analyzed in a *hermeneutical-phenomenological* way, in distinction from Tillich's *transcendental* approach or Alston's *analytical-epistemological* approach.

I am not defining phenomenology in the classic sense of (the early) Husserl but more along the lines of the later development since Heidegger, as a hermeneutical description and analysis of religious experience as it appears in the everyday world in the participation in liturgy and the faith praxis of daily life. Phenomenology describes the appearance of phenomena, in this case we are concerned with the phenomenon that people believe.

Husserl's concept of experience was strongly directed at knowing objects as purely as possible. To do this, he argued for the intuition of essences in order to establish what things truly are. Phenomena are viewed as objects and experience is viewed theoretically, entirely separated from living contexts. The later Husserl did pay attention to the everyday world in which people live (*Lebenswelt*) in connection with pre-theoretical understanding but it was primarily Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Ricoeur and others who described the life world (*Lebenswelt*) of human beings.³ In Heidegger we also see that phenomenology becomes hermeneutical. Not only do human beings need comprehension and understanding in communicating with others, but they are themselves *verstehende* beings. Experience is interpreted experience which requires understanding (*Verstehen*). The human being is an interpreting, hermeneutical being and *experience* is therefore *hermeneutical* in nature and that also applies to religious experience.

4. The Christian faith can be traced back to experiences with God that the first witnesses in the Old and New Testaments had. It goes back to narrated events with a history-like character. Root experiences (Fackenheim) are the exodus from Egypt and the life and work, death and resurrection of Christ. These acts of Transcendence are celebrated in the liturgy as thanksgiving to God whose acts are experienced as a gift.⁴ These root experiences of transcendence are the starting point and norm for experiences that Christians can have with God. This gives the *hermeneutical* (interpretive) *character of religious experience* a double meaning: the testimony requires explanation but the witness is himself explained by the testimony through which the experience of the witness becomes religious. By retelling biblical stories the believer's experience can be influenced

if he reads his own situation through the lens of those stories. Religious experience is thus an experience with everyday experience.⁵

5. I described religious experience in the Introduction to this volume as the involvement of the whole human being with Transcendence. We now need to specify that further. In §4 of this chapter I will point to *three aspects of religious experience* that I will mention here without further explanation:

- a. being touched by God, through which an experience becomes a religious experience, I call the *trans-intentional aspect*;
- b. the object pole, the content of faith, is called the *narrative aspect*;
- c. the subject pole, being grasped by the content, is the *affective-cognitive aspect*.

6. The answer to the question of whether faith is rational depends on, among other things, the *view of rationality* that is being invoked. Because of the influence of the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism, Tillich finds it difficult to do justice to the historically anchored Christian faith. For a practice-oriented rationality this is different.

There are, as we said in the previous chapter, different variations of practice-oriented rationality, such as *contextualism* which makes rationally relative to the practice (ch. 2.4). I use a different variation of a practice-oriented rationality, i.e. *presumptionism*.

I prefer presumptionism to the related position of social evidentialism. The objection to the latter is that it requires that reasons be given a priori if a belief is to qualify as being rational and that a judgement needs to be a judgement made by experts. This is valid, of course, for science (and also for theology) but not for the accounting for faith that can be asked of anyone in his or her situation. Everyone is obligated in matters of faith to use his or her ability to be rational. That obtains thus not only for the theologian but also the believer.

Presumptionism proceeds on the principle of presumption: it is rational to accept propositions as credible without first giving reasons for them, unless reasons against such acceptance can be given. This principle acknowledges that it is possible to give positive reasons for a belief. It differs from evidentialism in that it does not require reason to be given beforehand, which is what evidentialism requires. If one endorses the rule of rational acceptance, positive reasons can be given afterwards, at least

³ See P. Janssen, 'Lebenswelt,' in *HWPV* V, 151-55; C.O. Schragg, *The Resources of Rationality*, 103-15.

⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology*, 126.

⁵ W. Stoker, *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?* 213-21.

if the situation calls for such. I will later, as a positive reason for faith, provide an argument from religious experience.

7. Revelation can be viewed in several different ways. In classical apologetics special revelation was seen as the communication of supernatural truths that were not contrary to reason but did transcend it. Revelation concerned supernatural truths such as the Trinity or incarnation. With respect to revelation, Tillich emphasizes primarily its event-character. The believer experiences the New Being in Christ as an event. In Alston's direct perception the event-character is also central. That is not incorrect, but it is one-sided. In Tillich and Alston we miss reflection on the temporal aspect of the religious experience. Experience, even momentary experience, always occurs in time, as we will see (§4).

In this study I view revelation as God's making himself known to human beings. The content of faith is therefore not to be seen as a system of truths and is not limited to an event but has primarily the structure of a narrative, the story of the testimonies of people about their encounters and dealings with God, as reported in the Old and New Testaments.

8. I described rationality in the Introduction to this volume as the responsible use of our ability to be rational and I specified that further as the practice-oriented rationality of presumptionism. That requires supplementation. One could get the impression that rationality is limited to the rationality of a person. That is one-sided. One can also speak of the rationality of the faith content, as Locke's book, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), indicates.

If the faith content is no longer seen as consisting of supernatural truths but primarily as the story of God with people, can we still speak of the rationality of the form of that faith content? Rationality has to do also with the responsibility to strive after clarity, intelligibility and optimal understanding.⁶ That can also happen in the telling or making of a tale. We will see that telling a story is a form of argumentation. Narratives such as the gospel of Mark give a narrative explanation for the paradoxical event that a person like Jesus, powerful in word and deed, is at the same time the suffering Son of Man (ch. 4).

In short, the question of whether faith is rational should be viewed broadly. It has to do not only with the witness — is he or she rational in accepting the testimony to transcendence? (chs. 5.4 and 6.3) — but also

with the narrative form of the faith content (ch. 4) and with the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience (ch. 3.5.2).

9. How can one account for faith without a transcendental anchoring of religion in human nature? This accounting for faith happens in two steps. First, we will analyze the essence of religious experience and indicate its rationality (chs. 3-5) and subsequently give a positive reason for faith, which I call the argument from religious experience (ch. 6).

This chapter provides the building blocks for this accounting for faith and also makes a beginning at answering the question of the rationality of religious experience (§5.2). I will begin with a preliminary question: can we indeed speak of religious experience? Levinas does not think so. Is the concept religious experience self-contradictory (§2)? Without a satisfactory answer to this question, we cannot go any further with this study. Subsequently, we will analyze the notion of the Christian faith as a testimony to Transcendence (§3). On that basis I will describe religious experience as faith experience in its different aspects (§4). In the final section the rationality of the first aspect of religious experience will be indicated, the trans-intentional aspect, introduced by a exploration of the worldview a priori that replaces the religious a priori (§5).

2. The Experience of Religious Transcendence

Some religious experiences are theophanies, such as God appearing to Moses in the burning bush which was not consumed (Exodus 3). In such a direct, momentary religious experience we see the problem of religious experience sharply — and not only of these direct experiences but also of the lasting, mediated experiences: is an *experience* of religious transcendence possible? Do we not have here two entirely different kinds of entities, the human being and God, the contrast between whom is brought out impressively in God's answer to Job (Job 38-41)? In how far can a manifestation of or proclamation from God be experienced?

Experience implies intentionality, the intention of a person to direct himself at something. This notion seems to conflict with that which is proper to the manifestation of God who presents himself without any intention on the part of the human being.⁷ Levinas places all the emphasis

⁶ J.W. van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality*, 2.

⁷ E. Levinas, 'Dieu et la Philosophie', in: E. Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, 104, 109, 118.

on the radical O/other in an event of Transcendence, so that a term like religious experience is no longer suitable to describe an event of being involved with Transcendence.

Experiences of actual transcendence are not experiences in the strict sense of the word, according to Levinas. They remain alien to us, although they influence us deeply. Levinas stresses the difference between God and human beings. A divine revelation means a disruption of our order. Experience entails intentionality and in Husserl, according to Levinas, intentionality is the same as identification, recognition or conceiving something.⁸ Such a grasp of the object by the subject is excluded in the relationship with God. There it concerns a 'riddle,' an 'intervention of a meaning that disturbs the phenomenon' in distinction from the phenomenon that belongs to our reality.⁹ It concerns a truth that cannot be converted into a phenomenon and therefore Levinas does not recognise any presence, as is apparent from the following quote:

The 'great experiences' of our lives are actually never *lived*. Do the religions come to us from a past that has never been a pure 'now'? They owe their greatness to the excess that transcends the capacity of the phenomenon, the present and the memory. To the voice that calls from the Burning Bush Moses answers: 'Here I am,' but he does not dare look up. The glory-filled theophany that makes so much humility possible fails through the same humility that forces the eyes downward.¹⁰

In short, when Levinas speaks of the 'relationless relation' with the Infinite, he does not use the term experience or does so with reservation.¹¹

The fact that we are subjects also arises, according to Levinas, in such a way that we cannot appropriate the beginning or the origin of being subjects. Being touched by Transcendence is an 'implanting without reception, which like a consuming fire scorches the place where it is to grow'.¹² He distances himself radically from every philosophy that starts with the human being as subject. There is no consciousness or conscience that precedes the testimony. The I is thus constituted by the address of the other. We should understand this as follows: the human being is not a true human being until he is thus constituted by the radical O/other. Every presence is impossible, if it concerns the revelation of the wholly O/other.

⁸ E. Levinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 22.

⁹ E. Levinas, 'Être et phénomène,' in: Levinas, *En découvrant*, 213.

¹¹ R. Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*, 54, n. 42, R.D.N. van Riessen, 'Beyond Representation and Concept: The Language of Testimony,' 211.

¹² Levinas, 'Dieu et la philosophie,' 110.

Levinas thus points to two questions: that of the (impossible) *experience* of Transcendence and that of the *erasing of the subject*. I will explore the first question of whether the term religious experience is self-contradictory more deeply. As far as the second question is concerned I will limit myself to a brief comment. A philosophical discussion of Levinas' view of the subject lies outside my topic.¹³

Is Religious Experience a Self-Contradictory Concept?

Levinas is right to point to the radical difference between God and the human being, but does that also imply a complete erasure of human subjectivity in a confrontation with Transcendence? Moses says in Exodus 3, which Levinas quotes, 'Here I am.' It is difficult to understand statements such as these in any other way than as the acceptance of responsibility and obedience to the divine command. There must, I maintain with Ricoeur, be a self that precedes the call in order to accept responsibility. The conscience of the human being is addressed by something external to him. Moses is addressed, during the theophany, as a person in dialogue with the voice. Moses' objections to carrying out the task are met. Instead of an erasure of the human subject, one can better speak of a *transformation* in confrontation with Transcendence. Moses receives power to carry out the task after God makes several promises. Isaiah is purified of unrighteousness during his commission (Isaiah 6) and through the vision that led to his conversion Saul receives new religious insight (Acts 9). Countless testimonies of religious experiences speak of the transformation of the subject, discussed by W. James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

Is the term religious experience a self-contradictory concept? That depends on how the relation between experience and intentionality is viewed. Human nature is characterized anthropologically by the polar opposition of being determined and being free. In anthropology this is an important topic that is worked out in various ways: undergoing/suffering and acting (Aristotle, Schleiermacher and Ricoeur), thrownness and projection (Heidegger), destiny and freedom (Tillich), determination and openness (Gadamer). This polar opposition of being determined and being free points to the fact that the human being cannot be investigated in

¹³ On Levinas' view of the subject see Horner, *Rethinking God*, 61-65.

isolation but only in relation to the world. In other words, experience is characterized by *transcendence* (generally in a non-religious sense) and characterized by *transcendence* as transcendence of oneself to that which *intentionality*. Transcendence is characteristic of human existence as being in the other than oneself is characteristic of human existence, directed at human beings and world (Heidegger). It makes intentionality, directed at human beings and world (Heidegger). It makes intentionality, directed at human beings and world (Heidegger). It makes intentionality, directed at human beings and world (Heidegger).

things in the world, possible poles. Experience is never simply something internal but always has two poles: the human being and his world(s). Experience implies intentionality, the transcendence of oneself. And this confronts us directly with the problem indicated above of whether religious experience is at all possible and if the term is self-contradictory. How is the human being, to whom this-worldly transcendence belongs, open to the infinite, to religious Transcendence? We can expand our intentions infinitely, but qualitative infinity does not lead us to qualitative infinity. Formulated in terms of intentionality, is the human consciousness exclusively an intentional consciousness, a consciousness directed at the world and objects, an object-consciousness? God is not an object in the sense in which we deal with objects in everyday life. If the human consciousness is exclusively intentional, then Levinas is correct to say that a relationship with God is not possible, because God announces himself from somewhere else and must not be thought of as the correlate of our consciousness. Our relationship with God does not lend itself to being expressed in terms of intentionality.

Intentionality can be viewed idealistically as consciously postulated and desired or realistically as an interplay between the human being and the other. In both cases we are dealing with relationships within this world, which is transcended in a religious experience. Intentionality seems to be incompatible with religious Transcendence. Is the term religious experience not self-contradictory?

Schleiermacher, Otto and Tillich acknowledged this problem of the relationship with God and thus also that of religious experience. Schleiermacher argues in *On Religion* that the first mysterious moment of the religious experience is indescribable and defines it other than as intentional when he remarks that intuition and feeling are not yet separated and sense and object merge, as it were, into each other.¹⁴ In *The Christian Faith* he is way of describing God as a this-worldly object and argues that God is given to us in feeling in an original way.¹⁵ R. Otto writes in

¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion* (1799), §73.
¹⁵ Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*, 10.

Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (1830), §4.4.

Das Heilige of the confrontation with the 'wholly Other,' something that is of an entirely different order from myself. The numinous is something of an irrational, it is inexpressible insofar as it falls outside the category of rational, it is indefinable concepts. Although it does not withdraw from our known and definable concepts. Although it does not withdraw from our feeling, it does withdraw from our conceptualization.¹⁶ Tillich understood religious experience presupposes something more and something else than the subject-object scheme. He sought a solution in 'mysticism as a higher awareness of God in which the opposition between subject and object is transcended.'

How can we conceive of the relationship with God? Let us first look at how Levinas searches for an answer to this question. Husserl placed all the emphasis on the theoretical relationship of the consciousness as of a subject over against an object. For example, in his *Ideen I* he does take into consideration that there are non-theoretical relationships in everyday life, such as practical, affective or aesthetic relationships. Here, however, according to Levinas, Husserl cannot do full justice to them because he is methodologically intentional too much.¹⁷

Levinas' critique of Husserl is that intentionality is in internal perception characterized by adequacy, i.e. the complete agreement between intentionality and the object of the intention.¹⁸ By thus understanding the intentionality to the other as adequacy, the difference between the self and the other is obliterated: the other is translated into terms of me. It is there precisely that our relationship with God is different, for there the term adequacy applies to the idea of the infinite.¹⁹ This idea, as Descartes inadequacy shows, is not produced by me nor can it be made equal to me. I am a finite substance and therefore I cannot derive the idea of the infinite from me. This idea comes from a substance that, according to Descartes is itself 'truly infinite.'²⁰ God or the idea of infinity is therefore not an object of intentionality.

So that we can conceive of God in the way Descartes indicates, Levinas shows that the consciousness is not exclusively intentional. The relationship to God is, he argues, a relationship without intentionality, a thinking that is no longer characterized by an aim, by a relationship that

¹⁶ R. Otto, *Das Heilige*, ch. 10.

¹⁷ Homer, *Rethinking God*, 51f.

17 Horner, *Rethinking God*, 51f.

18 This criticism of Husserl should be more nuanced. See R. Welten, *Fenomenologie en beeldverbod in Emmanuel Levinas* (Phenomenology and the Prohibition of Images in Emmanuel Levinas) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 129–30.

¹⁹ Levinas *Totalité et Infini*, XV.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, XV.
²⁰ Cf., for example, 'Dieu en la philosophie', 104-08.

displays no will or intention.²¹ Levinas accepts a non-intentional consciousness, an indirect consciousness, 'immediate, but without an intentional aim; implicit and purely of accompaniment.'²² This pre-reflective consciousness is not active but pure passivity. Levinas formulates it in ethical categories as a 'bad conscience: without intentions, without aims, without the protective mask of the character contemplating himself in the mirror of the world, self-assured and affirming himself.'²³ Because of this non-intentional consciousness, this more than subjective ability, the person can be related to God. This is, given the asymmetry of the relationship, not a relationship in the second person, not an I-Thou relationship. God is not only not an object but also not a conversation partner.²⁴ God reveals himself only through our neighbour in an ethical sense. Others, such as orphans, widows and strangers address me from 'on high' because they call me to responsibility. They have something transcendent because God has a covenant with them. The dimension from which they speak to me — beyond being — is that of the third person, who always remains a 'He.'²⁵ The other is found in the tracks of this Absent One who has passed by us in an undiscoverable way, as he did with Moses, who only saw God's back. There is therefore no reciprocity in the relationship to the Other, but only asymmetry, as Levinas remarks in the following quote:

Does not what we call the word of God come to me in the demand that challenges me and claims me, and before any invitation to dialogue, does it not break through the form of generality under which the individual who resembles me appears to me and only shows himself, and become the face of the other person? ... Does not the challenge make me enter into a non-intentional thought of the un-graspable?²⁶

Levinas states correctly that we should conceive of *Transcendence* as vertical and not as a horizontal extension of our human reality. It is for that reason that our idea of God falls outside of human intentionality, as directness at the o/Other. Descartes' notion of the Infinite and Anselm's definition of God as 'that which nothing greater can be conceived' indicate that. One can, however, make the following objections to Levinas:

²¹ E. Levinas, 'Dieu et la philosophie,' 105f., 108f., 118. See also E. Levinas, *Transcendence et intelligibilité*.

²² E. Levinas, 'Nonintentional Consciousness,' 127f.

²³ Levinas, 'Nonintentional Consciousness,' 129.

²⁴ Levinas, 'Dieu et la Philosophie,' 115.

²⁵ Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, 15.

²⁶ Levinas, 'Nonintentional Consciousness,' 131.

1. Although Levinas himself does not view intentionality only theoretically and takes into account non-theoretical relationships, such as affective, practical and aesthetic relationships, he does not consider the terminology to be suitable for the relationship with the Infinite. He sees experience as a grasp of the Other, in which intentionality is nonetheless viewed in a *theoretical* way. Thus, one can hardly speak of religious experience, which is precisely my starting point for an accounting for faith. Just like Levinas, I am also looking to make room for vertical transcendence, but, unlike him, I am attempting to use the term experience in a broad way.

2. It is one-sided to speak about God only in the third person. If we see how Levinas describes the relationship with the Infinite, it is comprehensible, but it is not supported in the Scriptures with their different genres. In the Tenakh, for example, we also find the language of invocation, lament and dispute. It is one-sided to speak about God only in terms of ethics. It is not the prescriptive genre with commandments that is the basic form of Scripture but narrative, as we will see in the following section. The first commandment is love for God, which is what the Song of Songs also describes. A love relationship is different from an ethical relationship. Therefore, we cannot do without the language of the second person. Morality itself already presupposes something that transcends the ethical, namely, trust in being or affirmation of life. Life, meaning and religion are more than morality.

Intentionality for Life

To come closer to answering the question of whether religious experience is a self-contradictory concept, we must first say more about intentionality, the involvement of a subject with something. Levinas already pointed to the intentionality for life. What this entails can be seen against the background of Husserl's view of intentionality.

We usually presuppose that a world exists independent of ourselves. Husserl calls this view a product of the natural attitude. Through which the 'enological reduction' he suspends this 'natural attitude' through which the phenomenal world appears as meaning in relation to my consciousness.

The consciousness thus has an 'intuiting of essences' (*Wesensschau*) separate from the continually changing world. The psychological ego, living in the world, becomes a transcendental ego of intentional acts for which the

world is the meaning-correlate. Therefore Husserl's phenomenology is a transcendental phenomenology. That to which the consciousness is directed is not the object outside of myself but the correlate of my consciousness and is not the object outside of myself but the consciously willed.²⁷ Husserl's phenomenology thus sees intentionality as immanent to the consciousness. Experience is thus viewed theoretically through the abstraction by phenomenological reduction from everyday reality.

Husserl thus emphasizes that the world that appears to us does so as a function of our apparatus of knowing. In itself that is correct, but idealism — the view that we ourselves are the origin of the world — is lurking. That conflicts, however, with our experience. Does Husserl not reach an impasse here with his phenomenological reduction? In one way or another, we need to do more justice than Husserl does to the experience of dependence in the pre-reflexive zones of our existence. Husserl's students have done so.

Regarding intentionality, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Ricoeur emphasize the exteriority of the consciousness.²⁸ Human existence is being-in-the-world. Their existential phenomenology rejects Husserl's classical phenomenology but can be connected to the concept of life world (*Lebenswelt*) of the later Husserl. The phenomenology of the later Husserl is more empirical and the world is no longer seen as being 'in' the consciousness. Linking up with this, an existential phenomenology attempts to go behind the objectifications and explanations of human reality through the study of history and sociology. Such phenomenology thus attempts to rediscover the lived historical experience that precedes and supports these objectifications and explanations. It is concerned with the intentionality for life.

The intentionality for life has to do with everyday life and points to a non-theoretical involvement of the human being with the world, persons and things. It concerns a direct relationship with these instead of an objectifying placing of oneself over against them. We perceive people and things in our familiar association with them or we even see them in their own uniqueness. We do not study the flower, but it cheers us with its colour and beauty.

The intentionality for life differs from the theoretical intentionality that belongs to the distancing attitude of a researcher towards an object. In classical science, before Thomas Kuhn, to set a human subject over

²⁷ Levinas, 'Nonintentional Consciousness,' 127.

²⁸ Ricoeur, *Husserl*, ch. 8; Heidegger, *Being and Time* (for Heidegger see A. Verbruggen, *De verwaarlozing van het zijnde* [The Neglect of the Being], 41-45); Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, Avant-Propos.

against an object to be investigated was the approved way of working. This attitude of scientific distance is not a primary relationship but one derived from the original world in which humans live. We may take theology in its relationship to the daily religious experience of the believer as an example. Someone's religious experience occurs in her life world as an intentionality for life, from which theology, as scientific reflection, is derived. Our life world is a reservoir of meanings, on which academic disciplines like theology reflect in objectifying and theoretical ways to explain them. First (not chronologically but primarily logically) the story of God's interaction with people, religious experience and then — and derived from the foregoing — theological reflection.²⁹

In stating that religious experience occurs in the life world with its intentionality for life, we have still not touched upon that which is unique about religious experience. The intentionality for life has to do with relationships in this world and religious experience as involvement with Transcendence; it is not limited to this world. The relationship with God is not only not a relationship with an object (theoretical intentionality) but differs just as much from pre-theoretical relationships in everyday life, such as the use of things as instruments or tools in work situations or the interpersonal relationship of friendship.

The question also arises as to how we can speak of a religious experience that occurs in and to our life world. Schleiermacher has shown that the term religious experience is not internally contradictory. He indicates how the relationship to God is 'immediate' on the one hand and occurs within everyday reality on the other. He also shows that the relationship with God involves more than the ethical. These are two matters that I indicated were problematic in Levinas. Schleiermacher does give an example of a transcendental-anthropological anchoring of religious experience, as we have seen (ch. 1.2.2). We can however, interpret his view of religious experience in a theological-anthropological way and make it fruitful for thinking about the relationship to God.

The Relationship to God as a Trans-Intentional Relationship

Schleiermacher describes the relationship to God as a feeling of absolute dependence and sees it as situated in the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness. The point of contact between God and human beings lies in

²⁹ Thus also C. van der Kooi, 'Enkele perspectieven en uitdagingen voor de dogmatiek' [Some Perspectives and Challenges for Dogmatics], 8f.

the immediate consciousness and does not concern an ethical relationship but the whole person. The immediate consciousness is the 'immediate presence of whole undivided Being,' also indicated by the word 'feeling,' by which he has in mind the immediate presence of the whole undivided existence.³⁰ I call this the heart of the human being. This original consciousness precedes knowledge and action. Although distinguished from it, this pre-reflective consciousness of the human being is connected to his intentional consciousness, with his emotions, actions and knowledge. The passive, pre-reflective consciousness is the hinge, the 'transition' between knowledge and action; it mediates the transition between moments in which knowledge or action is dominant.³¹ It constitutes the unity of knowledge and action and is their common ground.³² As an example of how this original, pre-reflective consciousness functions in conjunction with knowledge and action Schleiermacher points to the first encounter of Andrew and John with Jesus as the Christ (John 1). There is first of all the divine point of contact in the original consciousness and subsequently the insight 'We have found the Messiah' and the act of following Jesus. He states it thus: 'The influence of the Divine [was] the first... out of which proceeded a thought and an act.'³³

In this context Schleiermacher makes a remark about lasting experiences, which is my primary starting point for this study. That first moment of religious feeling, being touched in the pre-reflective consciousness, can, Schleiermacher holds, continue as a mood, a state of mind.³⁴ *The durability of the religious feeling is the mood.*³⁵ It guides all our activities,³⁶ our thoughts, actions and emotions. Thus, it can become a continuing consciousness for the person, on the basis of which he feels, thinks and acts.

Schleiermacher thus demonstrates the asymmetry and the passivity of the original moment of Transcendence in the human consciousness. To exclude language and interpretation from this is, however, not convincing, as he attempts to do when he tries to guarantee the absolute uniqueness of the relationship to God as an 'original revelation from God to the human being' by avoiding every representation of God. God is only the

³⁰ So Schleiermacher quotes Steffens in *The Christian Faith*, §3.2.

³¹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §3.4.

³² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §3.3; Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube* (1821), §8.2.

³³ Schleiermacher, *Christliche Sittenlehre Einleitung*, 21.

³⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §35.1.

³⁵ Schleiermacher, *Ästhetik* 1819, 22.

³⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §4.3.

'co-determinant in this feeling' of absolute dependence.³⁷ Nevertheless, he cannot avoid identifying this basic feeling. The awareness of absolute dependence is not automatically an expression of trust, as Schleiermacher holds. This depends on what power human beings are dependent. The term God, which Schleiermacher uses, is not a neutral one. In fact, the Christian faith stamps Schleiermacher's description of the feeling of absolute dependence. Therefore I interpret this original moment of Transcendence in human consciousness not as a universally valid transcendental-anthropological structure of being human but as a *theological-anthropological given that can clarify the contact with God in religious experience*.

Strictly on the pre-reflective level, there is not even any indication yet of a feeling of absolute dependence. That occurs only with the identification of this immediate experience of the human being as a feeling of absolute dependence. A hint that Schleiermacher himself was aware of this can be found in what he subsequently writes about God who is given to us in an original way. He follows with the remark that it is an immediate self-awareness that *becomes* an awareness of God.³⁸ That indicates that there is a development because of the moment of identification: an immediate *awareness* of dependence of a particular nature is called the feeling of absolute dependence. The 'whence' of this feeling of absolute independence is identified as God.

In this way Schleiermacher demonstrates that the relationship to God is originally asymmetrical and (as far as human beings are concerned) is passive. Such a relationship with God does not exclude language and interpretation. By describing the pre-reflective consciousness as the unity of the human subject he avoids reducing the whole process to a one-sided ethical relationship to God. It is the heart of the human being, the unity of our whole being, of our feelings, knowledge and actions. The immediate relationship to God does not exist in isolation but receives its concrete content in the intentionality for life, in the intentional consciousness. We are not conscious of something like the pure I in itself but only of an I constantly in relation to something.³⁹ In other words, the religious feeling or awareness does not exist in isolation but in continual conjunction with the human being's involvement with the world and thus with his intentionality for life.

³⁷ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §4.4.

³⁸ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §4.4.

³⁹ Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, 1st ed. (1821), §9.1.

Aside from Zen meditation which has no object, in daily life people experience God in and through people, nature and situations. The religious awareness is articulated in and through situations in which the human being is involved. Because of this, religious experience does not thereby become an experience of intentionality but is related to it and transcends it by being a religious disclosure. I. Ramsey speaks here of a *cosmic disclosure*, an insight through which something receives a depth-dimension and becomes an *ultimate concern*. The human being appears, in the end, to be more than an intentional, acting subject. In such a disclosure he goes through and over the intentional relationships which take place in daily life. For that reason I call the *relationship to God trans-intentional*. Rather than 'non-intentional,' I prefer to use the term 'trans-intentional': the relationship with God transcends our intentions, our involvement with people and things in this world. Religious experience is a trans-intentional experience with everyday experiences of the intentionality for life.

Schleiermacher thus indicates that it is possible to speak of religious experience. This, however, does not yet describe religious experience as an *event*, which is precisely where my interest lies and which will command our attention in the conclusion to this chapter (§5.2). In the meantime we can state with Schleiermacher that *religious experience is not a self-contradictory concept. We can describe it as an experience with a trans-intentional aspect*. In that sense religious experience meets the demand of rationality in a semantic sense: it is not a vague or unclear self-contradictory concept but is to be seen as trans-intentional.

Now that we have answered the preliminary question positively and have seen that religious experience is not a self-contradictory term, I can describe the context within which I speak about religious experience: the Christian faith viewed as testimony to Transcendence.

3. Testimony to Transcendence

I have described the Christian faith as a testimony to Transcendence. Such a testimony has two poles: on the one hand, a manifestation and proclamation of Transcendence and, on the other, the human being as a witness of what he has seen or heard.⁴⁰ What does this testimony and this being a witness entail?

⁴⁰ For the shift from manifestation to proclamation in the Jewish and Christian religions see Ricoeur, 'Manifestation and Proclamation,' in: Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 48-67.

The Pole of the Acting God

The first pole concerns the external moment of the testimony, which refers to the acting God. Stories have been told about this beginning with the patriarchs and continuing with the exodus from Egypt, the journey to the patriarchs and continuing with the exodus from Egypt, the journey to and life in Canaan, the exile, the return to the land Israel, the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth and the early community in the letters of the New Testament and in the Acts of the Apostles.

According to the witness of the New Testament, God was manifest in the form of Jesus. John connects proclamation ('In the beginning was the Word') with manifestation when he says: 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory ...' At the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration the text reads: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased' (Luke 3:22; cf. Luke 9:35). And in the different resurrection stories Jesus is (re)cognised as the Risen Christ. The other form in which God manifests himself is the Spirit. In the Old Testament the gift of the Spirit is given to the leaders and prophets of Israel, whereas in the New Testament the Spirit is associated primarily with Jesus. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Spirit, as the story of Pentecost witnesses, remains active (Acts 2).

Sometimes the actions of God are presupposed and the events narrate themselves, as in the book of Ruth. Sometimes the Scriptural witness presents an immediate manifestation of God or records a later reflection on God's self-revelation in the language of manifestation and proclamation (John 1). The Scriptural witness can also become hymnic in form, such as the hymn to the Son of Man (Philippians 2).

In the case of an event of Transcendence, *an historical event has an absolute character*. That was a problem for the classical view of rationality, as we saw in connection with Tillich. Tillich was still attempting to find a place for the actual life of Jesus of Nazareth, but we discovered a tension between the Christ of faith and Jesus of Nazareth in Tillich — a tension that could not be resolved. Others simply dismissed the historical event as merely a representation, an illustration of an insight that human beings themselves could have thought of. That was the view of Enlightenment deists and also appears in Lessing and Hegel in their sublimation of the representation into the concept. It was also Kant's view of Christology. In all these rationalistic views no justice was done to the idea that God's salvation is bound to time, place, facts, and to a concrete person.

How can we do justice to a *historical event* that has the absolute stamp of religious Transcendence? An answer can be given to this only after an

investigation of the content of faith. Here it will suffice to say that, at the very least, we must pay attention to the form of the witness. The majority of the testimonies in Scripture have a *narrative structure*. Because narrative is able to play with time, it can allow divine and human actions to merge, as we will see in connection with the gospel of Mark (ch. 4.3.2).

The story of God's interaction with people is told in such a way that what is told becomes history: in which humans themselves participate, even in events from the past. In the offering of the firstfruits the events of long ago were told in a confessional way, as if the people themselves had experienced them:

Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.' (Deuteronomy 26:5-9)

Here the people are summoned to an affirmation that their own experience merges with that of the deliverance from Egypt. It is not simply a declaration at a later point but an experience of this history of liberation as guided by God. The quote by Gadamer, which stands at the head of this chapter, applies here: 'what we encounter in a tradition says something to us. Understanding then [is, rather,] a genuine experience, ie [sic] an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth.'

From the perspective of the human being revelation is experience. People testify that God has shown himself to them as he 'passes by.' And they testify to this in narrative form. Narrative is the basic genre of Scripture.⁴¹ Religious experience is therefore primarily *narrative experience*. In the narrative (the Pentateuch, the synoptic gospels and Acts) God appears as actor in the events. This invokes the experience of God's involvement in history, which gives rise to the experience of hope in spite of the facts. This is intensified in the New Testament with the preaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The content of the testimony concerns salvation and blessing, redemption, and promise of the continuation of everyday life, also in the mate-

⁴¹ Brueggeman, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 134.

rial sense. Therefore, testimony is connected with all aspects of life and *narrative is connected with other genres in Scripture*. Experience is not only narrative-historical but also has different aspects, as the other biblical genres show.⁴²

The *prophetic genre* corresponds with narration to such an extent that it is also concerned with history, in particular with the future, the warning concerning the day of the Lord. Thus, there is tension on the one hand between the remembrance of God's liberating deeds in the past and on the other the warning about the future because of disobedience to God's commandments. In the prophetic genre the first person is used for God. Thus Jeremiah writes, 'The word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart"' (1:5). This is revelation as the voice behind the voice of the prophet — revelation as prompting. For many that is the model of revelation, as for N. Wolterstorff in his *Divine Discourse*.⁴³ That is one-sided, for there are many more genres in which we are dealing with revelation. By pointing to God's commandments, the prophetic genre appears to be connected with the prescriptive genre. Not only is there narrative-historical experience, the sense of God's involvement in history in interaction with human responses, but also the ethical experience in doing God's commandments.

In the *prescriptive genre* God's will is communicated to us, with, as its heart, the ten commandments introduced in the first person: 'I am ...' (Exodus 20:2f.). This prescriptive line is continued in the New Testament in the Sermon on the Mount. Whoever reads the parable of the Good Samaritan can hardly neglect the call of the ethical experience of responsibility.

A different kind of experience is that of the personal relationship with God, to which the *hymnic genre* witnesses. In the psalms of praise and thanksgiving God is thanked. In the psalms of lament we see a conversation: God is addressed in the second person, as in the Song of Songs, the love song about God and human beings. Buber and others make the I-Thou relationship central in the relationship with God.

The relationship is not always defined in terms of personal relationships, as is apparent from the *wisdom genre*. In Israel's wisdom literature it concerns the practical wisdom of life in general and in boundary situations such as suffering (Job) or sense of transcendence and meaninglessness (Ecclesiastes). Unlike Job, the personal relationship with God returns in Ecclesiastes. God is the hidden God. The issue here is the questions of life in general as they are invoked by basic experiences in a chaotic world.

⁴² On this see Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,' in: Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 73-118 and Ricoeur, 'Naming God,' in: *Figuring the Sacred*, 223-28.

⁴³ N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, ch. 3.

Narrative is part of the whole, which consists for the rest in commandments, prophecy, hymns and wisdom. God's commandments are given with reference to his involvement in Israel's history. And, conversely, the future of history is seen by the prophets in connection with performing God's commandments. Hymns of thanksgiving and praise are sung within the context of the story of God's involvement with people. Wisdom attempts to make religious experience as broad as possible and indicates that, in addition to redemption, the topics of creation and the everyday life of believers are discussed. Can we also call these other religious experiences testimonies even if they do not fall under the category of narrative-historical experience? I think so. People testify that life — in ethical, personal situations or simply in survival (Ruth) — involves God.

The Pole of the Witness

If the first pole of the testimony to Transcendence refers to the God who acts, the second pole concerns the witness. First of all, the witness himself appears to be involved in the testimony, through which the testimony also becomes a matter of confession, as the above example of offering the firstfruits shows.

The commitment to the testimony does not happen, then, in blind acceptance. To be committed to something presupposes making certain statements. Locke pointed to the problem of how we know whether something is a revelation of God: every testimony should be tested with respect to its *reliability*. There are two aspects concerning reliability: the subject matter and the witness himself.

As far as the subject matter itself is concerned, the question is whether it comes from God or is connected with false gods? Deutero-Isaiah, through a judicial process, places the actual acts of God in question and here the notion of what a witness is emerges quite clearly:

Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, 'It is true.' 'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'that I am God.' (Isaiah 43:9-12)

The process of witnessing for or against must demonstrate who gives life: Yahweh or the gods. In the New Testament the evangelist John links up with this: Jesus comes as the Light of the world and thus makes a separation between light and darkness, between truth and lies. As a revealing light he brings about judgement, a 'crisis.' The constant question is whether we are dealing with the true God or with an idol. In this judicial process Jesus' disciples should function as witnesses (John 15:27). It concerns what Ricoeur calls the 'criteriology of the divine.'⁴⁴ There is always the possibility that it is a testimony not to God but to an idol.

In addition to concerns about the reliability of the content of the testimony, that of the witness is also in question. There are different aspects to this. The original witness can be unreliable and understand illusions as to this. Also, because of fundamentalism the testimony recorded in revelations. Also, because of fundamentalism the testimony recorded in Scripture can be misused by believers for their own ends, as extremists — Christians, Moslems, and Hindus — do. The testimony of those who engage in murder with an appeal to the God they confess is, in my view, falsified by the wrong conduct that emerges from a pseudo-faith in that God.

The investigation of the reliability of a testimony entails investigating the historical reliability of Scripture. The testimony to religious Transcendence has, after all, to do with the testimony to a God who acts in history.

Absolute and Relative Factors in the Testimony

My conclusion is that in the Christian faith as testimony to Transcendence both *absolute* and *relative factors* play a role.⁴⁵ The testimony to religious Transcendence concerns something absolute, a form of or message from God. One of the most difficult problems in accounting for faith is to indicate how such a testimony can be described as *religious*. We made a start at such a description in the previous section. In an event of Transcendence the intentional relations in which people stand with others are breached and transcended by a trans-intentional relation with God. At the end of this chapter I will describe religious experience as an event of revelation.

⁴⁴ Ricoeur points to this term that he borrows from Nabert. See Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutics of Testimony,' in: *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 147.

⁴⁵ See also Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutics of Testimony,' 151.

Further, I established that the absolute character of a historical event comes into its own best through paying attention to *the form of the testimony*. The basic form of the testimony to Transcendence is narrative. As *mōry*. The basic form of the testimony to Transcendence is narrative. As an example of that, I will in the following chapter show how, with the help of the gospel of Mark, the narrative form is best suited to allow divine and human actions to merge.

The testimony is not only absolute but also our agreement with it. The latter has the character of confession and concerns a total commitment. For the accounting for faith, the question here is whether agreement with a historical testimony can be unconditional. Should one not follow the principle of proportionality as Locke did? According to this principle, one's measure of assent is dependent on the kind of evidence presented. That raises a problem in connection with the following.

Assenting to a religious testimony is not only weighing grounds for or against a belief. There is more to the acceptance of a belief. Because the person who receives the testimony (whether himself directly or via others) is involved in the testimony, it affects him in *his whole being*. The testimony transforms witnesses, in which the heart, mood, emotions and understanding are involved. Witnesses always respond affectively. Moses' response to the manifestation of Transcendence is holy fear (Exodus 3:6); Isaiah sensed his own impurity in the presence of God's holiness (Isaiah 6:5). Simeon's response was gratitude when he saw the child Jesus and he sang a hymn of praise (Luke 2:28) and the wise men from the East were filled with joy (Matthew 2:10). Does that make agreeing with a religious testimony irrational? What role does affectivity play in this agreement? In chapter 5 I will explore more closely the relation between affectivity and rationality for agreeing with a testimony.

The testimony is not only *absolute*; it is also *relative*. Critical investigation into the reliability of a testimony is required, both with respect to the subject matter as well as the witness. Such an investigation can degenerate into critique and scepticism of religion, as the deists in the time of the Enlightenment show. The witness becomes judge and judges the testimony on the basis of reason. This does not mean that we should not engage in critical investigation. If the believer is rational, he or she should be open to possible refutations of the testimony to Transcendence. That aspect of the acceptance of faith will receive further attention (chs. 5, 4 and 6.3).

From the human perspective revelation is experience. The analysis of the testimony to Transcendence given here makes it possible to elaborate more fully on the working definition of religious experience given in the

introduction to this volume. Experience is, after all, at the heart of this accounting for faith.

4. Religious Experience: Trans-Intentional, Affective-Cognitive and Narrative

In this hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith we need to indicate how religious experience is rational. We need, therefore, to elaborate on the working definition of religious experience given in the Introduction to this volume. This working definition was: religious experience is the involvement of the entire person with Transcendence. Formulated in that way, it obtains for religion in general. Because we are concerned with the Christian faith in particular I will define religious experience more narrowly as faith experience. *Trans-intentionality* is the defining feature of religious experience, which we explored in §2. There are other aspects to religious experience, however. Let us look at two. The testimony to Transcendence affects the whole person, including his mood and emotions. This is the *affective aspect* of religious experience. In addition to knowledge and action, there is also mood and emotion, all of which come together in the heart of the human being. Religious experience does not occur in isolation from our relationships with the world but in and through everyday life. Religious experience as faith experience therefore also has a *narrative aspect*. Narrative is the basic genre in Scripture. The lives of people can also best be described as stories. The last two aspects require further explanation.

The Affective-Cognitive Aspect

The human being is first of all an inhabitant of the world. I referred already above to the life world (*Lebenswelt*) with its intentionality for life. Thinkers such as Heidegger, Levinas, Strasser, Bollnow and Ricoeur point out that our place in this life world has primarily an affective character. In this respect there is a difference between feeling and knowing. Knowing externalizes its object and postulates it, through which a split between subject and object arises. In contrast, feeling is the affirmation of a relationship to the world that unceasingly expresses our belonging to it, which is deeper than any duality of subject over against object. The human being is, in one way or another, 'in tune with' her life world, prior to any intended orientation to it.

as fear, rage or uncertainty.⁴⁶ The testimony to Transcendence involves the person as an affective being and therefore also as a cognitive and acting being. Affectivity stamps the insight of faith and the acts of the believer. According to Pascal, knowing God is a matter of the heart: 'It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.'⁴⁷ Affectivity is closely connected with cognition. Faith knowledge is affective knowledge. The understanding makes something coherent from that which affects us in our hearts. Thus communication about religious experience is possible.

Religious experience is narrative in two ways — with respect to content and its reception. Regarding content, we saw how the basic genre of Scripture is narrative (§3). Now we will say more about the subject pole, the reception by the witness.

The human being is an interpreting, hermeneutical being. His *experience* can therefore be called *hermeneutical*. Persons and things do not have labels with fixed meanings. Our contact with humans and with the world is always one that involves interpretation. We understand something-as-something. In our discussion of Alston we remarked that perception is 'identifying something as something' (ch. 2.3). Heidegger calls this the 'hermeneutical as.' We see something like a house and that indicates how we are to use it. We do not observe it, but we inhabit it and feel at home there. Interpretation determines our way of existence as belonging to, as Being-in-the-world. Applied to experience we can speak

⁴⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.
⁴⁷ B. Pascal, *Pensées*, 171.

B. Pascal, *Pensées*, 154 (fr. 278).

We live not only in a linguistic, cultural order but also in a moral and worldview order. In one way or another, the human being is required to orient himself in his life. Religious believers experience the world as the orient of God or, in the case of Hindus, as a divine emanation that at creation will flow back into the divine, whereas humanists see the same point as a natural process determined by evolution.

world as a past and a future. The hermeneutical experience is deepened by the factor of *time*, through which it is ultimately *narrative* in nature. The human being has a consciousness of time that things and nature do not have. There is not a cosmological time, the time of the seasons, but the experienced only cosmological time, the time of remembrance and expectation. In addition to having a human time of remembrance and expectation, that is, they live out their existence, human beings also exist historically, that is, they live out their existence in a temporal way. Being human occurs within a temporal event that tence in a temporal way. We do not leave our past behind us, with only has a future and a past. The past alone is impossible. The past continues to play a role and to influence the meaning of future events. And, the future before us. Living the present alone is impossible. The past continues to play a role and to influence the meaning of future events. And, conversely, the relationship to the future determines how the human being acts in the present. The present moment is not independent but is enclosed by the past and the future. The human being is situated in a present that is linked to a past *and* a future extending before him that still makes demands on him. Although we live in the present, life extends over the past and the future.

Time determines our experience in three ways: a present time of things in the past, a present time of things in the present and a present time of things in the future. These three ways in which time is present constitute a unity, which becomes visible in the form of a story.⁴⁸ We tell the story of our lives in the present of present things, in which the present time of the past and the present time of the future prove to be indispensable.

Experience is the always the experience of an individual; an individual, however, does not exist in isolation but is part of a community. Tillich thus correctly considers the polar elements of individualization

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⁴⁸ S. Cites, 'T
Confessions X.20.

(individuals) and participation (community) to be one of the ontological structures of human nature. The relationship with others is constitutive for the person.

The hermeneutical experience cannot occur without tradition. People exist in a web of tradition/s and community/ies. Gadamer has discussed the latter in his references to the historical-effective consciousness (*das wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewusstsein*). Our consciousness does not only arise through the process of history but is also conscious of that historical process.⁴⁹ We do not live in history, but our experience occurs in a historical way, woven as we are with history and its continuing effects and in such a way that we cannot objectify its effect on us, because it is part of the historical phenomenon itself. That also explains why the view of rationality found in classical foundationalism is *passé* and should be replaced by a practice-oriented rationality. Reason can no longer do service as the final suprahistorical source of all authority, as was believed to be the case in the Enlightenment. The faith of the Enlightenment in the unity and unchangeability of reason which would obtain for everyone in all cultures and times has been unmasked as an illusion.

Temporally determined experience thus points to the *identity* of the human being. If we are asked personally who we are, we do not produce our passport but relate our life stories. The identity of the person is not fixed in his character but has a temporal dimension: living in the present, we are also involved with the past and the future. Identity is then also best expressed in one's life story. Identity is *narrative identity*. To be human is not just to live *in* history but also to occur *as* history. It is precisely for that reason that historical and fictive stories are told. How the story of the Bible as testimony to Transcendence asks for assent from the reader or hearer will be discussed in the next chapter.

Time and narrative determine human identity, as can be seen from people's life stories, but how does that life story attain its content? From the perspective of the Christian tradition one can say: standing within the effective history of a reading community, people orient themselves to sacred texts like Scripture. The question is whether Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' expresses this strongly enough. Do religious texts not break through our horizons? How does the narrative-hermeneutical aspect relate to the trans-intentional aspect?

The Heart: The Judgement

The believer has the status of a witness. That entails no passive attitude and no blind acceptance. The testimony is not only absolute but also relative. It requires investigation into its reliability. By assenting to a testimony the believer as witness is asked to make a judgement about the testimony to Transcendence that has come to him via sacred texts or a direct experience. In classical foundationalism's view of rationality judgement played hardly any role. That was because rationality was considered to be a procedure through which something that was immediately justified could be converted into something that was immediately justified. Rationality is thus a question of following rules and in this procedure the human being as a person is discounted. This formal evidentialism was maintained from Descartes to logical positivism. An impersonal epistemological 'I' fit this model best.

In a practice-oriented rationality it is different. Here judgement plays an important role. In a practice-oriented view of rationality the human being is important as a *person* because rationality involves the judgement of the person involved. Judgements are necessary in situations in which we lack rules to determine our decisions and actions. The capacity to make a rational judgement is the capacity to evaluate a situation and reasons and thus come to a responsible and rational decision without rules established beforehand.⁵⁰ Precisely with respect to religion and world-views it is important to realize that judgement is a matter of the whole person, of the *heart* of the human being, as the seat of knowledge and emotion.

If we now take these aspects of religious experience together, then religious experience can be described as faith experience in the following way. Religious Transcendence touches us in our hearts. That is the *trans-intentional aspect* of religious experience. This sense of being touched does not occur as something separate but involves the whole person. I call that the *affective-cognitive aspect* of religious experience. Affectivity also stamps insights and actions. The awareness of being touched occurs for the person in and through her situations in this world. That is the *narrative aspect* of religious experience.

Religious experience as faith experience can therefore be defined in the following way: religious experience is a *trans-intentional experience* in which the human being in his *affectivity* and *narrative identity* is involved

⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxi-xxii, 310-25.

⁵⁰ H. I. Brown, *Rationality*, 137.

with religious Transcendence that expresses itself primarily in narrative form.

This description of religious experience in its three aspects obtains both for direct experiences and non-direct lasting experiences. The trans-intentional aspect applies to both equally, whereas the other two aspects receive different emphases in relation to the two kinds of experiences. In direct experiences, such as a conversion experience or a charismatic experience emotion plays a major role and the narrative aspect remains more in the background. In lasting experiences, on the other hand, the emphasis lies more on the mood than on emotion and the narrative of God's involvement with people receives more emphasis.

To summarize, we have, in this chapter, seen that religious experience is not a self-contradictory concept. Next, we stated what the Christian faith as testimony to transcendence entails. It was established that both absolute and relative factors play a role in such a testimony. The analysis of the testimony made it possible to indicate three aspects in religious experience.

With these building blocks we are now able to present the proposed accounting for faith in two steps. We will first explore the rationality of religious experience in its three aspects. The first aspect of religious experience, trans-intentionality, will be discussed in the following section. The rationality of the narrative and affective aspects will be treated in the following chapters (4 and 5). After that I will present a positive reason for faith, the argument from religious experience (ch. 6).

5. Religion and Rationality

Before we look at the rationality of the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience, another matter demands our attention.

It will not have escaped the reader that I simply start with the fact that there are believers, with their experience of the Christian faith as testimony to Transcendence. Tillich went even further back, by arguing that religion is part of human nature. However, due to the fact that (Christian) faith is no longer an obvious choice in Western society, I do not find such a transcendental foundation for religion convincing. In addition to religion, secular worldviews have also arisen since the Romantic period. This section will begin by showing that a religious a priori is non-existent, although one can speak of a worldview a priori, in order to indicate the importance of both religion and worldview(s) in general for society.

The tendency to construct a worldview belongs to human nature. We cannot point to a religious a priori, but we can point to a *worldview a priori*.

5.1. A Worldview A Priori

Human being is characterized by the polar opposition of being bound and being free. Heidegger uses the terms 'thrownness' and 'projection' for this opposition, as 'state-of-mind' (*Befindlichkeit*) and as interpretation (*Verstehen*).⁵¹ This polar opposition as characteristic of human being demands our attention because it makes clear that having a worldview belongs to human existence.

Our thrownness is apparent from our 'state-of-mind,' from our mood. Our world is disclosed in this mood, through which we can direct ourselves towards something. Thrownness entails that we are suddenly aware in everyday life that we are there and have to be there, whereas the 'whence' and the 'whither' remain in darkness.⁵² The term thrownness indicates, with its past participle, the past: we are thrown. Human existence is always stamped by its past. Given our birth, country, parents, etc., we have *certain possibilities in life* whereas others are closed to us. We find that we are already in certain contexts and situations. Finding ourselves to be thrown into certain situation determines the limits that are present and determines *where* they lie — between possible and impossible experiences.

In addition to the awareness that we are there is also that of having to be.⁵³ We should give form to our existence. This is the matter of *human existence as projection*. We should take up our thrownness. Our existence includes, as stated, a to be and a can be. Heidegger himself holds that human existence is primarily a 'potentiality-for-Being.'⁵⁴ Because of interpretation we can give our lives direction and orientation. We are hermeneutical beings. Heidegger calls the horizon of disclosure 'world,' viewed as a place with which people are involved.

The world is disclosed to us through *mood*, through which we, via interpretation, can direct ourselves more concretely towards something. Because of this disclosure, we can meet other people and deal with anti-

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 171-72.

⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 173.

⁵³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32-33, 68.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 182-86.

malis and things in everyday life. Our interpreting orientation presupposes a normative framework, a horizon, a world in which that here a context, in this study I use the term practice for this.

World or practice is the framework of understanding in which the human being stands and on the basis of which he can orient himself.⁵⁵ Things, events, do not occur in isolation but always in connection with something else. Because of the world or practice in which we are involved, we can orient ourselves. Initially, that is the world in which we grow up. Slowly, however, people become involved in different practices, such as occupation, sports or a religious community. Wittgenstein speaks in this connection of language game or form of life. A certain framework indicates beforehand (a priori) the possibilities of understanding, in which the human being can give form to his life.

We thus see that the construction of a worldview is given with our existence as thrownness and projection. Heidegger holds that we cannot go further back than the fact of our thrownness, further back than the fact that we are there. He calls this the 'facticity' of human existence.⁵⁶ Who or what 'throws' remains an open question for Heidegger; projection also places us in open space without protection. The question arises as to the goal of our projection. What is the destiny of the human being? This ontological 'why?' thus indicates that worldview is part of human nature.

I will remark, in passing, that this 'why?' is ontological in distinction from the ontic 'why?' in which concrete answers can be given on the basis of the worldview with which we are acquainted. The ontological 'why?' concerns the conditions of experience and is therefore to be seen as transcendental-anthropological.

The polar opposition of thrownness and projection poses the question of why and therewith indicates the necessity of a worldview for the individual. In his analysis of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, G. Schulz comes to the conclusion that the question of 'why?' arises from the experience of being thrown into existence, which is beyond our control. The latter obtains just as much for our projection, which occurs without any guarantees.⁵⁷ Thus the question of 'why?' arises from the experience of not having any control over life, which makes it necessary to have a worldview.

One issue that receives too little attention in Heidegger in *Being and Time* is that with which this study is concerned. In the pre-theoretical

contact with humans and things he does not discuss the good life, even though he is fundamentally concerned with the ontological question of 'why?'. Heidegger's analysis of the world of the human being is oriented one-sidedly to the world of work. Things are described as tools, in their everyday function of usefulness, of being 'for' something. Situations of living, of friendships and the other, in brief, of the good life, are barely broached. With Aristotle and Charles Taylor I view the good life as an important factor in what it is to be human.⁵⁸ I understand the term 'good' not only in a moral sense but also more broadly as that which makes life worth living. The good life has to do with the ascription of meaning.

A worldview in the making is part of human nature. I am talking of a worldview a priori, which expresses the integrating and unifying character of our experience. The reader should note that this has to do with a worldview as an a priori, an elementary way of orientation. It is a transcendental-anthropological condition that we assume in order to make human life intelligible. It is the condition for the actual worldview in general. In life as such, this worldview a priori is the a priori element of actual worldviews like humanism, nationalism or a specific religion.

How does this worldview a priori become visible in society? Some adhere to a particular secular worldview with an organizational structure, such as humanism (and its opposite — fascism and nihilism) or to a religion. Others have a more fragmented worldview and are members of one-issue movements such as the environmental or peace movements. There are also people who say that they have no worldview. They mean that they do not have a particular worldview or religion, nor are they members of one-issue movements. I would claim — on the basis of my assertion that worldview is an anthropological a priori — that they do have a worldview, which is unrelated and consists of a mixture of prevailing norms and values, borrowed from the existing culture. There are always certain dominant values in any culture, such as reason in the Enlightenment, feeling in the Romantic period and in contemporary culture, hedonism and functional rationality which is concerned with efficiency.

The worldview a priori takes the place of the religious a priori and replaces Tillich's mysticism as a category and Schleiermacher's anthropological anchoring of religion. It differs from the religious a priori in the following way: whereas Tillich assumes that the human being is by nature religious, I hold that she has by nature a worldview in the making. From the structure of human nature we cannot determine whether human beings are religious but only that they have certain worldviews, regardless of how that becomes concretely manifested in one's life. In the actual

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 91-122.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174.

⁵⁷ G. Schulz, *Weltanschauung als Antwort*, 63.

⁵⁸ C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, part I.

content of this worldview a priori there is the possibility that it will be secular or religious as involvement with religious Transcendence.

The gain of this proposal is that we can show in the public square through dialogue with other worldviews that religion and worldviews are important for society. A human being cannot live without orientation for his life. In addition, it thus becomes clear that no one is neutral and that everyone in one way or another has a worldview. This proposal also throws light on the relationship between secular worldviews and religion.

Secular worldviews are often viewed as religions. Most of those who adhere to secular worldviews are not happy with this, because they have chosen consciously not for religion but for a secular worldview. We do justice to both secular worldviews and religions when we recognize that they are different. And that difference consists in whether or not they are involved with religious Transcendence.

What does the worldview a priori entail for the Christian faith? In the Christian faith as testimony to Transcendence it concerns being a witness, *giving an answer to the manifestation and proclamation of religious Transcendence*. We have to do then with an actual event that cannot be based in a religious a priori but in worldview a priori. Insofar as a religion is also a worldview, this a priori obtains for religion as well.

Secular worldviews like humanism, Marxism or nationalism can be anchored in the worldview a priori. They have to do *only with this world*. It is the horizon of this world that determines the meaning of things and events and it is precisely here that religion differs: the manifestation of religious Transcendence that breaks through into our order of references and horizons. It means the obstruction of our horizons, in which our orientation and knowledge occurs. Religious experience was therefore described above as trans-intentional experience. Religion also occurs within the context of the world, with the difference that it places everyday experiences in a 'cosmic' or religious perspective.

In short, one cannot determine on the basis of human nature that the human being is necessarily religious but only that he has a worldview a priori that can either, concretely, be a secular worldview or a religion. Not religion but a worldview in the making is part of human nature.

5.2. *The Trans-Intentional Aspect of Religious Experience*

I discussed the worldview a priori as a preliminary discussion to this question. With respect to the accounting for faith itself, I will first show

the rationality of religious experience in its three aspects. How can the first aspect of religious experience, the trans-intentional, be viewed as rational?

The trans-intentional aspect of religious experience was discussed by way of seeking an answer to the question of whether the term religious experience was self-contradictory. We concluded that it was not, because experience is not exclusively intentional (§2). In this respect the term religious experience is rational in a semantic sense: it is not a self-contradictory concept. More important is the question of whether religious experience is not self-contradictory in a logical sense as well: Can religious experience be described in such a way that it is not an irrational event but an event that does transcend reason but is not in conflict with it?

Kant, Husserl and Levinas hold that revelation and religious experience cannot be described as a phenomenon. The reason lies in that they view phenomenon in such a way that it conflicts with the notion of revelation and religious experience. Kant limited phenomenon to the sensory world, to physical phenomena. For Husserl and Levinas, each in his own way, intentionality was the problem. As a phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion attempts to describe the revelation of God with its reverse side, religious experience, as a phenomenon, whereby he redefines the notion of phenomenon.⁵⁹ In order to describe the rationality of religious experience, I will make use of Marion's phenomenology.

Marion has described the possibility of religious experience in his *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*.⁶⁰ In this phenomenology of gift he provides a description of the phenomenon of a revelation by God. He shows that it is not an irrational event, as Otto described it in his *Das Heilige*, but can be described philosophically as a phenomenon.

Husserl held that intuition was the basis for the appearance of a phenomenon. We all look at things from our own perspective, but we do not see them completely. From our limited horizon we see only a certain side of the cube. The phenomenon is thus characterized by a shortage that we need to fill in. It is my intention, my directedness that provides the supplementation and allows me to see the object as a cube. Marion turns the

⁵⁹ For a more extensive treatment see W. Stoker, 'God denken in de filosofie' [Thinking God in Philosophy], 36-46.

⁶⁰ J.-L. Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*. The references in the text are to this English edition. The term 'donation' ('giving') is both a verb as well as the result: the gift (see pp. 61, 65).

matter around by, instead of speaking of a phenomenon that is poor with respect to intuition, pointing to a phenomenon that is saturated with intuition. He states it thus: 'To the phenomenon characterized most often by lack or poverty of intuition ... why wouldn't there correspond the possibility of a phenomenon where intuition would give *more*, indeed *immensely more*, than the intention would ever have aimed at or foreseen?' (197). Mundane examples of such a *saturated*, *replete phenomenon* can be found in historical events such as the French Revolution. So many factors are in play here that every explanation falls short. This phenomenon yields more than any intention of the players in that event. There is a plurality of horizons that make it impossible to fix the event as an object (229). Or one can take a painting as an example. The experience of seeing the painting transcends the understanding. It is not, as Husserl's phenomenon is, an inadequate view that needs to be supplemented by intentionality but yields excessively more than what the viewer expects. The phenomenon is saturated, replete. We see here that how something appears to us is intensified in the saturated phenomenon. This phenomenon overwhelms me, as when I look into the sun. Instead of there being a shortage of intuition or perception, there is an abundance, and the perception of the phenomenon is no longer dependent on my intentionality.

A revelation from God can also be described as a saturated phenomenon. Marion cites Christ as an example of a religious phenomenon: Christ went beyond the Old Testament expectations of the Messiah. The radiant, luminous cloud that appeared during the transfiguration on the mountain makes the disciples fall prostrate out of fear (Matthew 17:6-8). The different types of the saturated phenomenon merge together here, whereby the saturated phenomenon is redoubled (242f.). Revelation is a redoubled saturated phenomenon: giving oneself is revealing oneself (234-45).

Marion conceives of God phenomenologically as gift, God as being-as-given *par excellence*. What he writes about this can also obtain as a description of what I call the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience, though with a certain caveat.⁶¹

1. The term *par excellence* entails that God contacts human beings as a gift without any limitations. When such happens, the infinite (in the quantitative sense) surpasses that which we can see. It is therefore different from many other phenomena, of which we constantly see only a part, depending on our point of view. God, however, reveals himself in the way that a cubist painter unfolds all dimensions of an object so that they

are all visible. "'God" reveals himself given unreservedly, with nothing withheld.'⁶²

2. This absolute way of appearing is such that it saturates each and every horizon 'with a dazzling obviousness.' Marion brings two aspects of the saturated phenomenon together here. First of all the dazzling obviousness: the aspect of the saturated phenomenon that indicates that the phenomenon not only quantitatively but also qualitatively exceeds that the phenomenon infinitely. This overcomes us literally when we look into the sun through which everything is overexposed. "'God" in his very dazzlingness shines by his absence.'⁶³ One can think here of the story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain: 'As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning' (Luke 9:29).

He also speaks of the absolute way of appearing that saturates every horizon. In *Being Given* the saturated phenomenon is viewed, according to the category of modality, as 'not to be looked at,' because it, like the 'face' in Levinas, will not allow itself to be reduced to me (231f.). This 'absoluteness' refers to the type of saturated phenomenon that appears without any relation to anything else, in an absolute way. In *Being Given* this type is called 'Flesh,' viewed as unmediated presence in itself (auto-affection, 231f.). In connection with absolute way of appearing one can think of Jesus' statement that the Kingdom of God is not of this world. 3. The gift *par excellence* can thus change into a gift of 'abandonment.' We try to manipulate and define most mundane phenomena. But that is not possible here. For God as phenomenon *par excellence* it obtains that 'here, by contrast, a radical non-availability makes their abandonment inevitable ... [the phenomenon] abandons itself to the point of disappearing as an object that is possessable, manipulable, discernible.'⁶⁴ In *Being Given* this is the general characteristic of the phenomenon as gift. Giving itself is the same as 'letting appear without reserve and in person,' to abandoning itself to sight, in short, to the pure appearing of a phenomenon (74, 60, 90). Marion confirms what we have discovered: experience is not defined only by intentionality. The contact with God is also an experience, even if it is not intentional. Viewed in this way, this moment of religious experience cannot be irrational but is rather to be viewed as rational in the sense that it is to be described philosophically as a *saturated phenomenon par excellence*. This moment of religious experience

⁶² Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology,' 292.

⁶³ Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology,' 292.

⁶⁴ Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology,' 292f.

⁶¹ J.-L. Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology,' 279-96.

is rational not only semantically but also logically and as a paradox *par excellence* (235). It concerns a paradox in the sense that it transcends all expectations and possibilities. God gives himself as a gift without human expectations and possibilities, without analogy, without repetition or 'forethought, without measure.⁶⁵ An action by God to people does — in short, it remains unavailable. The saturated phenomenon is unconditional (with respect to the horizon); it cannot be converted to the one to whom it appears and as gift it is original and without cause. Marion describes revelation in this way (141). Above we saw that he speaks of the absolute presence in itself (231f.). One can think here of the appearance of God such as to Moses in the burning bush or Jacob's wrestling with the stranger. One can speak unmistakably of an absolute moment here, but at the same time such an appearance of God is imbedded in a narrative context. This narrative context forms the motivation for the theology: the liberation of God's oppressed people from Egypt or Jacob's phany: the liberation of his brother Esau whom he will soon encounter, bad relationship with his brother Esau will end. At that moment Jacob uncertain as to how this confrontation will end. At that moment Jacob meets the man at the Jabbok, an event so clearly coloured by the approaching confrontation with Esau. In that sense a direct religious experience still has a context and is never entirely unmediated.

In connection with Gadamer's fusion of horizons, I asked whether religious texts do not break through horizons rather than fusing them. In this respect Marion provides a corrective to Gadamer's hermeneutics. The trans-intentional aspect of religious experience is also present in a religious text like the Bible. It witnesses, after all, to experiences that people have had with God. For the reader that can mean that his horizon has been breached by the text of Scripture. At the same time Gadamer provides a corrective to Marion. Marion sets hermeneutics too quickly aside by pointing one-sidedly to the radical otherness of the phenomenon. We do not give meaning to something but receive it as a gift, according to Marion (112). He gives the impression that revelation, like lightning, happens without a context. Who God is and who Christ is emerges, in my view, best in stories that are excessive, in the sense of Marion's saturated phenomenon, in their reference to God but, as stories, require further explanation for the contemporary reader. At the end of his *Being Given* Marion says some worthwhile things about the human subject as receiver

of the phenomenon. But this does not undo the fact that human beings always understand the call of the phenomenon in a historically determined context.

It seems better, therefore, to view revelation more broadly: God's liberating history with Israel, the story that is told about that history, together with the commandments, prophecy and wisdom. This cannot be clarified exclusively by means of the saturated phenomenon. More is needed. Marion has not described (the possibility of) revelation philosophically, as he claimed to do, but only its central aspect, the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience, when God comes into contact with a human being. This trans-intentional aspect of religious experience, the point at which God comes into contact with human beings, should be supplemented further. As a saturated phenomenon, revelation or, better, the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience is articulated in stories, commandments, prophecy and wisdom. Marion's phenomenological description of the central aspect or revelation will be supplemented with a narrative explanation of the story. That will occur in the following chapter when we investigate more closely the rationality of the narrative aspect of religious experience.

⁶⁵ Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology,' 293.

4. NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

Learning excludes founding oneself.
Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 224

1. Introduction

Our *ultimate concern* is doubly narrative, as emerged from my discussion of religious experience: religious experience is an experience in which the human being is involved, in his *narrative identity*, with religious Transcendence, which occurs primarily in *narrative form*. Narrativity concerns thus both the (object) pole with which the believer is involved, the faith content, and the believer herself, the subject pole of faith.

A practice-oriented rationality recognizes the uniqueness of a practice; in our case, this is the Christian faith as anchored in history. Alston acknowledges this but does not take it into account in his accounting for faith, because he is concerned primarily with the direct perception of God (ch. 2). If we do not view faith as a number of isolated statements, such as the question of whether God exists, but view it as a web of beliefs, rituals and behaviour, then an accounting for faith should also pay attention to the *content of the faith*. I will do that by means of an example, i.e. the gospel of Mark. Of course, the content of the Christian faith includes more than this gospel, e.g. other Bible books, the doctrine of the church, classical creeds, dogmatics, spiritual literature and songs. I will limit myself to this gospel as exemplary for the Christian faith. I choose the gospel precisely because this accounting for faith starts, after all, with the social phenomenon that there is a Christian faith community for which Scripture is the primary source.

In this chapter I will investigate the object pole of the faith, the form of the faith content, with respect to its rationality. We will see how telling stories is a form of argumentation and how Mark gives a narrative explanation of the core of the faith content that Jesus is the living Son of God. It is not only the faith content that is in narrative form, but the identity of the one who assents to the testimony is narrative in form as well. We answer the question of who we are by telling the stories of our lives.

Identity is *narrative identity*. How do people arrive at their identity? We will see that the faith content and the identity of the person who allows himself to be formed by the testimony to Transcendence are interwoven. To this end, in this chapter I will also say something about the response of the reader or hearer to the gospel of Mark. As witness, the believer is drawn into the story insofar as he himself, confronted by the gospel of Mark, is challenged by it and his identity is rewritten. Mark tells the story in such a way that the reader must choose sides. It can even be said that his narrative remains unfinished without the reader making a choice. How is the influence on the one who hears or reads the gospel to be described? Our life stories cross those of others. We stand in a tradition, a community of people. Insofar as people are part of a Christian community, their identity is stamped by that.

There are *three figurations* to be indicated in experience and that obtains also for religious experience: that of daily life and the human self (1), the experiences of people with God, written down and fixed in Scripture and summarized as the world of the kingdom of God, are made applicable in ritual celebrations (2), and, finally, the re-figuration of the human being through the biblical story, the ritual of the liturgy and the praxis of faith (3).

Focusing on the sacraments, E. Schillebeeckx describes beautifully the interaction between these three aspects of the believer's experience (everyday faith, the celebration of the liturgy and the re-figuration of the believer):

It is precisely the ritual celebrations that show how God's traces in the Christians' engagement with the world are the *presupposition* of their sacramental celebrations, and in its turn, the ritual celebration — as the place where they are nourished by God in and via Jesus, by the power of Christ's Spirit — give courage, orientation and inspiration to the engagement with the world, to which the liturgy leads back.¹

The second experience adds something to the self of daily experience and I will clarify that by using a term from the theory of history by L. O. Mink: *configuration*. The figuration of the self in everyday life, *prefiguration*, receives depth, new orientation, through the configuration achieved by the biblical story, because of which one can speak of a *refiguration* of the self.

I thus view human beings dynamically: on the one side is the pole of the self, the prefiguration with its movement towards refiguration and, on

¹ E. Schillebeeckx, 'Naar een herontdekking van de christelijke sacramenten ...' [Towards a Rediscovery of the Christian Sacraments], 185.

the other, the pole of Scripture and the ritual of the liturgy that initiates this dynamic. Seen in this way, there is a circle in lasting religious experiences. It begins with the everyday life of the believer, whose self has the form of prefiguration. This everyday experience of the believer and the form of prefiguration is refigured because of the level of configuration the believer himself is in the proclamation and, more broadly, the celebration of the liturgy. The process thus comes full circle back to the believer.

In this chapter I will investigate how Mark's narrative explanation that Jesus is the living Son of God is intended to convince the reader. What literary means does Mark use to achieve this?

We will begin with the question of the extent to which everyday life has the form of a story (§2). Next, I will show that the form of the faith content is rational because of its narrative argument and explanation that Jesus is the living Son of God. This is introduced by indicating that literary stories such as the biblical story add something extra to life (§3). Further, we will explore how Mark's narrative explanation achieves a certain effect with the reader. We will indicate the consequences of the influence of the narrative on the reader in accepting the rationality of such a testimony to Transcendence (§4). Finally, I will indicate the difference between how a practice-oriented rationality views narrative and how the rationality of classical foundationalism views it.

2. Prefiguration: Life as a Story in the Making

Being human is characterized by boundedness and freedom, passivity and action, throwness and projection. We can see something of the temporal aspect of experience if we look at the latter from the second pole of projection and action.

What kind of structure does our acting display? An act is characterized by a structure of means and goals. We set a goal and choose the means to achieve that goal. This is how it happens in everyday life. Do actions or, better, our everyday experiences have a narrative structure? According to D. Carr, actions point to such a structure with their 'before' and 'after'. Others, such as L.O. Mink, H. White, and F. Kernode, deny this. They hold that there is no relation between our actions, between everyday experience and stories. We will discuss the latter view first.

Life is Not a Narrative

Stories are not lived; rather, we make and tell them. They are intelligible and full of meaning but we impose them upon our experience, which in itself has no narrative structure. Thus F. Kernode writes:

World and book, it may be, are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing; we stand alone before them, aware of their arbitrariness and impenetrability, knowing that they may be narratives only because of our impudent intervention, and susceptible of interpretation only by our hermetic tricks.²

We should not ascribe any narrative properties to reality. Life does not have the form of a story with a beginning, middle and end. Stories are simply told and narrative qualities are transferred from literature to life. H. White argues that not the story but human events as they are reported in medieval chronicles are the paradigm for the way in which reality presents itself to the observer.³ Thus the fictive story is an escape, comfort or opium for the reader. It distorts life.

In postmodern theology we find this point of view in D. Cupitt, who sees reality as a text and language as an extended system of signs. The world is like a sea of signs in which we are swimming.⁴ Meaning is nothing else but the difference in signs. We know the meaning of the word 'cat' not because the sign refers to a reality outside of ourselves but because the sign is different from other signs like 'mat' or 'hat'. We tell each other stories to protect ourselves from the emptiness of meaning. That is why religion is important, for it suppresses the emptiness by its stories.⁵ Outside of our story there is nothing but formlessness. Applied to the story of the gospel, this would mean that this story cannot be anchored in actual, historical events. It would only refer to people, places and events *within* the story itself. We saw how Tillich attempted to make a connection between the historical Jesus and the Christ of Scripture, but this is not possible within this view. Everyday experience does not have any figuration, no temporal structure that gives coherence. Nor does the human being himself display any kind of figuration either through which he receives his identity.

Is this view convincing? Life is often absurd, but people nonetheless do point to coherence in their lives and they tell their stories. That happens

² F. Kernode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 145.

³ H. White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' 24f.

⁴ D. Cupitt, *The Time Being*, 64.

⁵ D. Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 80.

particularly during pastoral visits, consultations with a psychiatrist, in court or in an autobiography. Is something implicit being made explicit here or are people simply constructing a world of illusions? If someone writes an autobiography, is such, apart from the factual givens, simply a fiction that the author imposes on his life?

Other theologians and philosophers maintain the opposite. Philosophers such as D. Carr, S. Crites, W.A. Kort and A. MacIntyre argue that experience has a narrative structure. The physical world is indeed indifferent to human affairs, but it is human reality that we are talking about and this is narrative in nature, so it is argued. The narrative theology of H. Frei and others maintains as well that our reality is a narrative. In a way different from that of philosophers this theology indicates the content of that story to be God's story, as we can read it in the Bible. I will first explore the theological and then the philosophical argument that experience has a narrative structure.

Reality as the Story of God

Orthodox postmodern theologians like H. Frei, G.A. Lindbeck, G. Loughlin and R. Thiemann argue, against the postmodern nihilism of theologians like D. Cupitt and M.C. Taylor, that reality does have a structure in that it is God's story. Loughlin expresses this in the following way:

Christianity is postmodern because it is not founded on anything other than the performance of its story. It cannot be established against nihilism by reason, but only presented as a radical alternative, as something else altogether. It is also postmodern because its story — God's story — imagines a world 'out of nothing', a world of becoming, in which people are not fixed essences but life narratives with a future.⁶

The Bible should not be understood in terms of the world but, conversely, the world in terms of the story of the Bible. The former is where mediating theology, such as Tillich's, falls short. After all, Tillich translated the Scripture into the idiom of philosophy by speaking about God as Being-Itself and about Christ as the New Being. In contrast, Lindbeck argues that theology should not translate reality into non-Biblical terms but should rewrite it as 'intratextual theology' within the framework of Scripture.⁷ In this connection Frei argues that Scripture should be read

figuratively or typologically.⁸ Figuration is both a literary as well as a historical procedure: 'an interpretation of stories and their meanings by weaving them together into a common narrative referring to a single history and its patterns of meaning.'⁹ This unique history is found in the Bible, which is then also viewed as a 'consuming text', a text that takes the world and life up into itself and thus becomes the standard for them. The reality of God in Christ is the reality. Frei takes over a suggestion here made by E. Auerbach. Other than Homer, who makes us forget reality for a few hours, the biblical story, according to Auerbach,

seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world ... must be fitted as an ingredient of the divine plan.¹⁰

It is a fascinating idea to spread the Biblical story like a cloth over our world with its many stories and to say that the biblical story is the true story of reality. Is not the Bible, after all, God's truth according to the faith community? This seems also to solve Lessing's problem of the dichotomy between the historical truths of the Bible and faith itself: past and present are connected, because God speaks to us in the present through the biblical story. The story of Jesus is also the story of the church, because that story continues in the church, as Loughlin argues.¹¹

In his *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* Frei hammers on the point that the meaning of the Biblical story does not lie in whether or not it refers correctly to history, as much historical criticism since the seventeenth century maintained. It lies, according to Frei's other work, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, in the true identity of the characters in the Bible and that of the readers. The Biblical story shows us who God and Jesus are and thus who we are. We should not, therefore, join the search of historical criticism for the Jesus of Nazareth behind the text. The meaning of the story lies in the text of the Biblical story, which is at the same time the true reality of today, yesterday and tomorrow.¹²

Frei argues for a literal reading of Scripture but not in the narrow sense of the word as it is used by many in the church. Rather, he intends it in

⁸ H. Frei, 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition ...', in: H. Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 120.

⁹ H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 2.

¹⁰ E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15f.; cited approvingly by Frei, *Eclipse*, 3.

¹¹ Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 82, 84.

¹² Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 154f.

⁶ G. Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 21.

⁷ G.A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 118.

the pre-modern sense in which literariness includes the figurative meaning.¹³ Placing the question of the historical reliability in parentheses, he takes up the question of who Jesus is. The gospels are

history-like precisely because like history-writing and the traditional novel and unlike myths and allegories they literally mean what they say. There is no gap between the representation and what is represented by it.¹⁴

As readers, we are required to step into the Biblical story, so that it also becomes our story and we find our own identity in that of Christ. That is what faith is: finding our own story in that of Christ. It is also in that sense that the Bible is a consuming text or, better, a text that we must consume to grow in the strength and form of Christ.¹⁵

This orthodox theology maintains, therefore, not only that life is a story but also that *the whole of reality has the structure of God's story*. Lindbeck's theory of religion clarifies this view endorsed by the Yale school. Religions are to be viewed as languages that we can learn only by speaking them. Lindbeck sees religion as a practice that one must learn.

In my view, religion is indeed a practice with its own rules, as we saw in the second chapter. In contextualism this often leads to relativism, because rationality is seen as internal and religions as institutions with their own rules. The Yale school avoids this relativism by enlarging the context. They make the practice of the Christian faith the normative story of reality as such. The (possible) relativism of contextualism is resolved by removing the context, by making this story already now, in anticipation of the future, the text of all reality. God's story thus functions as the text of the world.

Here we come across a position that H.M. Kuiter once, with a reference to Barth, called a 'like it or lump it' position. I do not find an argument here that indicates why, as a reader, one must insert oneself into the story. Can we not give reasons for our commitment to the Christian faith? Loughlin believes that the Bible is true, because it corresponds in the right way with God's actual world. How can one assert that when something like God's reality, God's kingdom, is still future? Thiennann is more cautious in this respect. In his *Revelation and Theology*, as indicated by the subtitle *The Gospel as Narrated Promise*, that Biblical reality is not the actual reality, as we know it, but is eschatological. It is a reality with the force of the promise that reality will be like that. Nevertheless, he follows

Frei in urging people to step into this story, for it is the norm of reality. We will explore the extent to which the position of 'like or lump it' applies to Thiennann's accounting for faith (ch. 6.2.1).

This narrative theology comes across very forcefully. It is presented as if it is the only way to explain Scripture. Does it not reflect something of a tyrannical authority in claiming to be the only actual world? What Auerbach writes about the New Testament is echoed in this position:

The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality — it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it¹⁶

Does narrative theology not repeat the old conception of the history of salvation, i.e. that the Bible can be viewed as a continuing history from beginning to end? Moreover, narrative theology does not provide much of an opening for dialogue in a pluralistic society. Other world religions and secular worldviews can also, from their position, make a similar *absolute claim*. And those claims can conflict with one another. Frei also dismisses too easily historical-critical research into the relation between the Bible and the actual life of Jesus of Nazareth. And, last but not least, Frei and his Yale school emphasize that the reader is taken up into the story. That is, in itself, correct, but that happens in another way than this narrative theology proposes. According to its representatives, there is room for the reader only if she, entirely apart from her context, apart from her time and place, is taken up into the story, as if there is no fusion of the horizons of the text and reader. This theological variant of the view that life is a story makes, in fact, a confessional statement but does not give any arguments for it. Long before the movie has ended, they speak apodictically of the end of the movie, whereas the keeping of the promise, the coming of the Kingdom of God, is more a matter of hope.

The Philosopher D. Carr on Life as a Story

Is life a story? The theological account of this view is not convincing. Let us therefore look at the philosophical arguments for it. The most extensive treatment is found in D. Carr in his *Time, Narrative, and History* and for that reason we will examine his argument.¹⁷

¹³ For this and what follows see Frei, *Eclipse*, 28; 'The "Literal Reading"', 117-52.

¹⁴ Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, xiv.

¹⁵ Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 139.

¹⁶ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 14f.

¹⁷ D. Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 19. The references in the text are to this work. See also D. Carr in: 'Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative', David Carr, Charles Taylor, Paul

Other than Frei, as a philosopher, Carr is concerned only with the narrative structure of reality and not with the question of what content that story should have. He points to Husserl's phenomenology of internal time-consciousness,¹⁸ Husserl argues that the most passive experience of the present still has a silent anticipation (protention) as well as a retrocipation (retention of the recent past). Our experience of time appears to be organized and structured (25). This structure is seen as that of part and whole. An example would be listening to the melody of a piece of music. To listen to this melody, at the moment of listening (the present) both the preceding (remembering) and expectation (anticipation) of what is coming need to be present as well. Thus Carr states: 'the flow of conscious life ... is lived as a complex of configurations whose phases figure as parts within larger wholes' (28). Time is more than the physical time of the universe. Human time is *lived time*. Our lives occur not only between birth and death like plants and animals, but we are also aware of time, as is apparent from the example of the experience to which Husserl points.

If we listen to music or participate in a game or simply walk through the room, we already experience the unity of an action because of the temporal succession. Carr holds that the structure of means and ends of an action is connected with the beginning, middle and end structure of stories, even though we are not always aware of that. The latter structure is characteristic for the story, in Carr's view. Aristotle already indicated that by the term plot. In his *Poetics* Aristotle states:

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to this principles.¹⁹

Carr uses the example of a serve in a tennis match (32f.). This single action is part of a larger whole. He argues in this way that the whole structure of experience is narrative (45-73). Experiences latch on to one another and this configuration process is analogous to what happens in a story.

Ricoeur, 160-87. For a similar point of view see S. Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience', 65-88; A. McIntyre, *After Virtue*, ch. 15; W. A. Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture*, ch. 1.

¹⁸ E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* (1893-1917), Husserliana Part X.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics* VII (p. 65).

Carr recognizes that there are differences between the story and experience as such. A possible objection is that life often has no real beginning or end as a book does. With respect to that objection Carr holds that the core of what a story is about, the configuration, the coherence of events, can also be detected in everyday human life. There are, indeed, differences between life viewed as a story and the fictive story in literature. The latter relates only what serves the plot whereas there is no such selection in life. Life as a story also lacks a narrator who indicates what the story line is. In life we do not choose our material as a storyteller chooses his, even though in telling the story of our lives, one can speak of a selection of events. In addition, the storyteller knows the end of the story — there too life differs from story. Nonetheless, Carr does not think that this contradicts his position:

The retrospective view of the narrator, with its capacity for seeing the whole in all its irony, is not in irreconcilable opposition to the agent's view but is an extension and refinement of a viewpoint inherent in action itself. (61)

In short, the narrative form is, in his view, a structure that is inherent to human experience. It is a primary act of the human spirit (65). It is the way in which we experience and act (68).

Life as a Story in the Making

Does life, everyday experience, the self of the human being, have a narrative structure, as Carr claims? Let us take Carr's example of the tennis serve. A story is more than one action. The action must not only be a whole through having a beginning, middle and end but also a unity, i.e. there must be coherence. Actions in a story are not only mutually connected with one another but also with the whole story and its pattern of beginning, middle and end. That is not the case in Carr's example of the tennis serve. We have a beginning indicated but not a middle or end. It is not apparent from the action itself what meaning it has in the whole match. Here we encounter what Danto called narrative sentences.²⁰ Something receives meaning only after a series of situations and actions. There is a difference between the reporter who covers the tennis match and the report that follows:

During the finale between the Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero and the Dutchman Martin Verkerk on Roland Garros (9-6-2003) Verkerk gained a lead in

²⁰ A. C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, ch. 8: 'Narrative Sentences.'

the second game. The reporter who was covering it live stated that this lead could mean the turn-around in the match in Verkerk's favour. The report in *Trouw* (a Dutch daily newspaper) the next day stated: 'From the first game, Verkerk lasted ten minutes and in which he [Verkerk] had to capitulate. Verkerk could not match the pressure of Ferrero's game (*Trouw* 10-6-2003).

It is only afterwards that one can say whether the tennis serve constituted a breakthrough in the game or even proved to be the winning serve. That it was the winning serve can be expressed only in narrative sentences that are not available at the moment of the action. Although the structure of beginning, middle and end is thus not immediately present in the action, as Carr holds,²¹ we can speak of an action that is part of a narrative in *the making*. Carr does not deny that, unlike a physical change, an action has intention and meaning but rejects the view that the story told later adds something extra to it through the act of 'emplotment,' of configuration. I would defend the latter. For constructing a story *imagination* is necessary.

For example, the gospel story is written from the perspective of the end, the resurrection of Christ, and attempts to provide a convincing coherent whole of the historical events. There is a difference between the factual event (the world behind the text) and the gospel story (the world of the text). Schneiders writes thus about the power of the imagination of Easter:

I have tried to show that what gave rise to the text was not simply the life of the actual earthly Jesus and the first Christian communities but the theological-spiritual imagination of the believing community, which transformed its historical experience into a dynamic image of Jesus the Christ as locus of divine revelation. The New Testament text is the product of the paschal imagination.²²

The story produces a connection between, for example, actions and characters of persons or between actions and circumstances that are unexpected and simply present. Human existence is, after all, not simply a matter of actions but also of undergoing situations that we do not choose. There can also be consequences to our actions that we did not intend. It is precisely to those things that a story attempts to bring coherence. Thus, the story configures all givens into a unity. In this way, as a configuration, the story differs from life as a prefiguration, as that which must be further refigured.

A *middle position* is emerging. Daily life is not formless or contradictory, as some postmodern writers contend, but it does not correspond entirely to what we would call a story, as Carr contends. Life is, so I hold with Ricoeur, a *narrative in the making*.²³

This middle position links up with Carr's reference to action, which cannot as yet be called a story. Carr points correctly to the correspondence between action and story but shoves them too easily together. Life does not have the form of a story in the sense of a configuration into a unity but is a story *in the making*. Life can develop into a story. Our actions in everyday life point to this. They are characterized by intention, judgment, and ask to be interpreted. There is yet something else: actions occur in a social context. A certain action depends, for its meaning, on a social symbolic system of signs, norms and rules, on what I have called a practice. That makes it possible for us to understand actions such as raising a hand as a greeting or a signal to stop.

Telling stories happens already in life itself when we tell the story of our lives or when we narrate histories. Ricoeur speaks here of a 'pre-narrative quality of human experience.'²⁴ How life is in quest of narrative is apparent from the fact that our story in the making receives depth in psychoanalysis, in therapeutic or pastoral conversations or in an autobiography.

Theologically, it obtains *a fortiori* that a human being is a narrative in the making. Life is a quest for a narrative. There is a tear in the fabric of human existence — this is the claim not only of religion but of philosophers as well, such as Plato, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. The mirror of the Christian tradition reflects the alienation of the human being *coram Deo* as sin. The heart of the Christian faith is that Christ brings salvation from God. Stories like the gospel stamp the identity of the reader. We thus encounter the *connection between narrativity and identity*. The identity of the human being answers the question of who he is. To arrive at the identity of someone, we cannot be limited to knowing his or her character; we need to know something about his or her relationships and circumstances. Therefore, identity can best be viewed as the story that we tell of our lives — thus as narrative identity. This obtains not only for the individual but also for the community. The community also has a narrative identity. The story that we tell about the human being and the community gives coherence to the discrepancies of life.

²¹ For a similar criticism see D. Pellauer, 'Limning the Liminal: Carr and Ricoeur on Time and Narrative,' 54.

²² S.M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 127.

²³ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I, 52-64; 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 20-33.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I, 74.

Historical and fictive stories, as well as the biblical story, give our everyday lives coherence or can even transform them. It is precisely through the weaving together of history and fiction that narrative identity emerges. Only by showing the extra that the literary, historical or biblical story gives to the story (in the making) of everyday life can the shortcoming of Carr's view be seen. We will look at this in the first part of the next section.

3. Configuration

If it is correct that the human being is a story in the making and that people need a story, this can then function as a point of contact for the Christian faith. People ask ultimate questions, such as that concerning salvation and redemption. The Christian faith gives an answer to this question.²⁵ The gospel of Mark shows that the salvation of God in Christ brings discipleship with it, in certain situations it can even lead to sacrifice. The accounting for faith that I will propose here begins with the situation of people who hear this gospel and wrestle with the question of whether they will accept this testimony. We will see how Mark argues and explains in a narrative way that Jesus is the living Son of God.

In connection with my objection to Carr's view of story, we must first be clear about what the *extra* is that the literary, historical and Biblical stories bring to the lives of people as stories in the making. That extra is *narrated time* in distinction from lived time.

3.1. The Extra of the Literary Story: Narrated Time

Phenomenology yields important insights regarding art. Merleau-Ponty views a painting not as a depiction or imitation of reality but as a recreation or transformation of daily reality. The painter gives, due to his imagination, a visual existence to what escapes our ordinary way of looking. Painting thus visualizes the fundamental features of things and creates its own world, 'the visual in the second power.'²⁶

It is, however, one-sided to talk about *imagination* only in connection with the visual. Imagination goes beyond the visual image and is also

connected with the 'semantic renewal' that a story gives, as Ricoeur writes:

Are we not ready to recognise in the power of imagination, no longer the faculty of deriving 'images' from our sensory experience, but the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves? This power would not be conveyed by images, but by the emergent meanings in our language. Imagination would thus be treated as a dimension of language.²⁷

Imagination is the ability of a narrator to bring heterogeneous elements into coherence in such a way that a new meaning arises. The example of the semantic model of the image is the *metaphor* and the *story*. The metaphor has the capacity to say something in terms of something else, whereas the story can say different things at once and in that way say something new. The sentence 'The chairperson ploughed through the meeting,' invokes the hard work of the farmer ploughing in the entirely different situation of a meeting. The activity of ploughing is taken out of its 'literal' context and placed in a new context through which the designation of the way of meeting is rewritten, semantically renewed.

Something similar obtains for stories. Just the metaphor rewrites the world, so the narrative gives new meaning to the world. The narrator transforms the discrepancies of how time is experienced into a coherent whole through plot and narrative. Ricoeur points out that in Aristotle the *mimesis* that a tragedy provides is not a copy of life but its logical structure and is thus intended to indicate its meaning.²⁸ Narrative *mimesis* does borrow from life but transforms it through the plot, viewed as a well-constructed story. Prefiguration needs configuration.

Narrative *mimesis* applies not only to literary fiction but also to the story of the historian about the past. Does it also apply to the story of the gospel? The story told by the evangelist Mark is not the work of a historian nor is it fiction. It is its own genre.

In Paul the proclamation of the 'gospel' was oral; in Mark the proclamation was given a narrative form. Mark could fall back on examples from the Old Testament: God's actions to Israel were narrated in semi-biographical narratives about Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. What is new in Mark is that the 'gospel of God' is the story of the rejected and crucified Jesus of Nazareth, which is told as an apocalyptic drama, in which the resurrection is an anticipation of God's victory over the power of evil at the second coming of the Son of Man.

²⁵ W. Stoker, *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God?* ch. 7.3-7.4.

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *L'Oeil et l'Esprit*.

²⁷ Ricoeur, 'Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics,' 181. For the concept of imagination see R. Kearny, *Poetics of Imagining*.

²⁸ Ricoeur, 'Can fictional narratives be true?' 8.

Narrative *mimesis* obtains, in my view, also for the gospel narrative — the power of imagination can be seen to be active there as well, as the quote from Schneiders above indicated (§2).

To indicate continuity and discontinuity between the pre-narrative life and the biblical narrative, we must first explore more precisely what a story is. We can describe a story as follows: '... a history proposed in a certain way which is presented to a reader by a narrator by means of a certain medium (in our case a text).'²⁹ Here the issue is the construction by a narrator of a world-in-words, which is presented to the reader or listener for his or her assessment. The author or narrator wants to communicate with the reader in that way. To do this he employs different means: he orders (configures) from his point of view givens such as time, space and persons so that they receive coherence through the plot. The plot shows us time as a coherent movement. For that, the succession of a series of events in time is configured into coherence, culmination and end.³⁰ Thus, a story can be described somewhat more broadly as follows: A story is the linguistic form in which events, times, spaces and persons from a point of view show the ordering of a plot with the intention of extracting a response from the reader.

We can see that different elements have roles to play in a story: narrator, time and space, characters and the reader. In the literature on narrative the question of what the decisive element in the story is is answered in different ways. Is it the plot (Aristotle), the characters of the personages (R. Scholes and R. Kellogg), time (F. Kemmode, G. Genette), the ages (R. Ricoeur) or a combination such as time reader (reader-response theory, W. Iser) or a combination such as time and reader (Ricoeur)? What one holds to be important depends, of course, on one's theory of narrative. Further, one element can weigh heavier in a certain story than others. Kort demonstrates this in connection with Biblical stories: for the plot he points to Exodus, for characters to Judges, for the narrator to the gospel of Mark and for atmosphere to Jonah. By the atmosphere he understands that narrative element that indicates the boundaries, that indicates what one can and cannot expect in a world of a certain story, what is and what is not possible.³¹

I want to concentrate the discussion on continuity and discontinuity between everyday life and the literary story by means of *the figuration of time in everyday life and in narrative*. Time is more complex than Carr

holds. Ricoeur demonstrates this on the basis of the same text by Husserl on the internal time-consciousness to which Carr refers.³²

Carr argued, appealing to Husserl, that (human) time is lived time, in which the structure of beginning, middle and end can be detected. This does not, however, adequately describe human time. That is apparent if we go more deeply into Carr's distinction between our lived experience of time, *lived time*, and the time of the universe.

Cosmic time, with its punctual now's and its uniform sequences before and after cannot be equated with the lived time that always has a past and a future. Cosmic time, determined as it is by the movement of the sun and moon, is indifferent to lived time with its qualitative difference between present, past and future. On the one hand, there is lived time, the stream of our short life between birth and death — Heidegger calls this lived time *Geschichtlichkeit* (historicality) — on the other hand, there is the cosmic time of the endless succession of moments. People experience conflict between them whenever they have had a very intense experience such as the loss of a loved one. They experience the emptiness of the time that indifferently continues ticking. 'The world just goes on, even though the experiences I'm having are so deep that my entire existence is being turned upside-down.'

People have always felt the imbalance between our lived time and cosmic time in which we seem to dissolve into nothing. People also speak of the brevity of life in comparison with immense time or in comparison with God's eternity. Augustine, for instance, writes:

And Thou, O Lord, art my comfort, my Father everlasting. But I have been divided amid times, the order of which I know not; and my thoughts, even the inmost bowels of my soul, are mangled with tumultuous varieties, until I flow together unto Thee, purged and molten in the fire of Thy love. (*Confessions*, Book XI, XXIX.39)

We would be going too far afield from our topic to explore how, according to Ricoeur, philosophical reflection on time by Augustine, Husserl and Heidegger has not succeeded in bridging this gulf between lived and cosmic time (III, 12-26). It is more important to look at Ricoeur's own position. He introduces a third time: *narrated time* (I, 52-87; III, 104-240). Only through narration does time become human: 'Time becomes human

²⁹ W. Weren, *Vensters op Jezus* [Windows to Jesus], 46.

³⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I, 38-51.

³¹ Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture*, 17, ch. 2. On Genette on time see Loughlin, *Telling God's Story*, 52-63 and for the reader-response theory see §4 in this chapter.

³² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* III, part 4, section 1, §2 (Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*, 20). See also Ricoeur, 'Narrated Time,' *Ricoeur Reader*, 338-54. The references in the text are to *Time and Narrative* I-III.

to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence' (I, 52). Historical and fictive narratives can bridge the gulf between lived time and cosmic time because together they form the third time, narrated time. What Ricoeur says here about narrative obtains also for the Biblical narrative.

Historical Narrative

Unlike cosmic time, the time of the historical narrative, just like lived time, has a present that makes us capable of distinguishing qualitatively between a before as past and an after as future. Unlike lived time, which is often individual, separate from others and can be experienced as disappearing (the finite time of the individual), the time of the historical narrative is the time in which it is possible to develop procedures that connect us with others and with the cosmos that we inhabit (public time).³³

How does historiography order lived time by means of the time of the narrative? In historiography our lived time is brought into line with cosmic time. Here people make use of calendars, through which both times are brought together (III, 105-09). There is also the succession of generations: it is not only so that the living take the place of the dead, through which process everything seems to disappear into a 'nothing'. There is also a coherence between the living and the dead in that we speak of the succession of generations and about traditions that should or should not be continued (III, 109-16). Finally, the historian points to trails throughout history which he attempts to establish by means of documents from the past and archeological discoveries (III, 116-26). Historiography thus invokes the past for the reader as lived reality.

Evangelists like Matthew and Luke also make use of such means. The gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus and thus gives Jesus his place in the history of Israel. Luke places the story of Jesus within political history by beginning the story of his birth with 'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world' (Luke 2:1).

³³ For the distinction between private and public time see Ricoeur, 'The Creativity of Language,' *Ricoeur Reader*, 466.

Fiction

Fiction also orders lived time. Fiction does refer to reality in a different way than historical narratives: the issue here is not so much events that have actually happened but, as Aristotle says, 'what may happen — what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity.'³⁴ The great dramatists show how something can be discussed by using a model. Fiction resorts to imaginary variations of time (III, 127-41). Novels are laboratories for fictive experiences of time. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* the burden of cosmic time presses down on the main characters. One can avoid the separation between cosmic and lived time as Septimus does by committing suicide or attempt to overcome it as Mrs Dalloway dies. Fiction can, more than the historian, play imaginatively with time so that tensions and their solutions come to light, as happens in Woolf's novel in a fascinating way (II, 101-12).³⁵

Ricoeur shows very well how both historiography and fiction borrow from each other (III, 180-92). The application of concepts from the field of literature to historiography is, according to T. de Boer, Ricoeur's unique contribution to the theory of history.³⁶ Historiography borrows from fiction. To tell his story of the past, the historian makes use of literary terms like plot and configuration. Thus he also needs to use imagination when he turns his facts into a story, because this process is essentially configuration. There is always more order in what the historian tells in his story than in the traces from the past. That is also true for the gospel story. The gospel of John indicates the important moment of Jesus' departure from this world by devoting a large section of his gospel to that. He interrupts the story of Jesus' suffering with a long farewell speech (John 13:31-17:26).

The eyes of fiction are also used to keep alive the memory of terrible events, as Elie Wiesel does in his books about the Holocaust. The reader should note, in passing, that, in the case of the Gospel, it is better to speak of a quasi-plot, because the term plot is borrowed from fiction. In what follows, however, my use of the term plot will include that qualification. Conversely, fiction also borrows from historical narratives: a story is told (most often) as if it happened in the past. It is also a story that

³⁴ Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics*, IX (p. 68), where he discusses the difference between the poet and the historian.

³⁵ Ricoeur, 'Narrated Time,' *Ricoeur Reader*, 351f.

³⁶ T. de Boer, 'Klassieke en narratieve theologie' [Classical and Narrative Theology], 290.

describes reality. In this way historiography and fiction are complementary answers to the gulf between lived and cosmic time. And that is because of the third time to which they give shape, narrated time. Ricoeur summarizes how human time is narrative time because of historical and fictional narratives:

It is in the intersection of history and fiction in the refiguration of time that we discover or invent ... what we might suitably call *human time*. Human time, that fragile mix where the representing of the past of history and the imaginative variations of fiction are joined against a background of the aporias of the phenomenology of time.³⁷

Through human time as *narrated time* the human being and the community receive their *narrative identity*. 'The fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific identity that can call their narrative identity' (III, 246). In short, the extra of the literary narrative consists in that telling stories is a means through which life gains in meaning. In the story there is more order than what we actually experience. Because of the narrated time of the story, life, lived time, is refigured. By telling the story of their lives anew, people or groups acquire their narrative identity.

The Bible Story

The gospels can also be viewed as emerging configurations of stories that were in circulation at the time. The gospel stories disclose for the reader the world of the New Being, of the coming Kingdom of God. They do so by inviting the readers to inhabit that world. In the gospel of Mark there are all kinds of elements that can be clarified by Ricoeur's theory, as Cook remarks:

The genius of Mark is that he was the first to configure all this into a plot with a coherent and followable storyline.... In the ongoing discussion over Mark's ending it is important to keep in mind that one of the primary functions of narrative is to mediate temporally as memory (the present of the past), attention (the present of the present), and anticipation (the present of the future). There can be no thought about time, as Ricoeur says, without narrated time. Thus the configuration of the world behind the text into a narrative text produces a new and qualitatively different experience of time. As such it inevitably projects a world before the text as the reader/listener engages the truth claims of the text itself and so refigures the text. In this

³⁷ Ricoeur, 'Narrated Time,' 354.

process we meet the limits of narrative in the inscrutability of time. But what narrative does is allow us to discover our personal and communal identities as active participants in an ongoing story, the story of God.³⁸

Cook points here to the *extra* of the gospel story in comparison to the events in the life of Jesus. The gospel narrative indicates the plot and therewith the identity of Jesus in a way that was not possible during Jesus' life. It is, after all, written from the perspective of the end, from that of the crucified Jesus who was raised from the dead. For that reason Mark can start with the words, 'The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' The gospel story shows the whole of Jesus' life in such a way that it answers the question of the identity of this person: He is the Messiah (Mark 8:29), the Son of the Blessed One (Mark 14:61).

The extra of the Bible story also concerns the effect on the reader or listener. In this quote Cook points out that the story makes us discover our own personal and communal identity in the continuing history of God. As human beings, we are stories in the making. To the question of who we are we can tell the story of our lives, which receive depth through the confrontation with the Bible story in order to make a choice as to what we stand for in life.

The Bible Story as a Religious Story

We should note an additional matter. A Bible story is a religious story, because of which it cannot be explained entirely in historical or literary terms. I have argued elsewhere for reworking the term myth for talking about Bible stories.³⁹ According to Eliade, myth relates

a sacred history, that is, a primal event that has occurred in the beginning of time, *ab initio* The myth is ... the history of that has happened *illegitimately* ... it is ... the story of a 'creation'; it is related how something has come to be, how it began to be.⁴⁰

As exemplary history, myth is a binding example for all acts and situations of a community. Because, according to the Jewish and Christian tradition, salvation does not occur in primal time but in history, the term myth needs to be recast for contemporary use. We need a different connection between myth and history. The history of Jesus has, for the

³⁸ M. L. Cook, *Christology as Narrative Quest*, 70.

³⁹ W. Stöcker, 'Myths and the Good Life,' 131-52.

⁴⁰ M. Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane*, 56.

Christian community; the function of a primal or foundational event and is therefore 'mythical' history. The foundation of salvation lies in the datable life history of Jesus Christ. To do justice to that, one needs to see the cross and resurrection as mythical. There is more at issue than a moment in history. Just as primal myths are part of rituals, the biblical story is for the believer primary in the liturgy. The central events in the life of Jesus Christ are the foundation of salvation. I express that by the term myth. In the worship service the primal events of baptism, communion, cross and resurrection are invoked in a way that actualizes them and are presented as salvation. In what follows we will also be presupposing this when we talk about the refiguration of the reader.

3.2. *The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Explanation*

The Biblical story does not supply an extra with respect to form but also with respect to the content. We will now see how Mark gives a narrative explanation that Jesus is the living Son of God. Following a story is following the contingent course of events and that resembles the following of an argument, in which the question is whether it convinces the reader or listener.

To relate and describe an event is often also *to explain* something. That is not true for all narratives. For example, novelists such as Iris Murdoch, John Irving and others see their task not as bringing coherence to a chaotic world but as reflecting that chaotic world as much as possible.⁴¹ However, it is true of stories in other situations that they are intended to explain something: (auto)biographies, the history that the historian writes about the past, the judge who has to judge the reliability of the story the accused tells him and the psychiatrist who seeks an explanation on the basis of the story her patient tells her about his past. In all these cases the issue is to describe events in order to explain something and to distinguish the correct description from incorrect ones. The gospel narrative in Mark is also intended to explain who this man Jesus truly is.

Is the story Mark tells convincing in what it wants to claim? The reader is — which is also the tension in a story — constantly surprised by the turns the tale takes, by the circumstances and reactions of the characters in the story. Does the story succeed in bringing the heterogeneous facts together and thus giving an explanation for the events?

According to some, Mark does not succeed, because he is not writing a story with a line that the reader can easily follow. It is stated that Mark

⁴¹ See H. Jansen, *Laughter among the Ruins*.

is not concerned with writing a carefully constructed story, a story with a plot, characters, times, spaces, theme and point of view from which the story is told to elicit a response from the reader. Papius, who provides the oldest witness to this gospel, says that Mark wrote accurately but not in an orderly fashion.⁴² Taylor judges Mark negatively in his historical-critical commentary:

The Gospel is not a carefully planned literary composition, but a popular writing conditioned by the state of the existing tradition Anxious to retain the pre-Markan complexes unbroken, especially if some of them were his own compositions, the Evangelist was not in a position to write freely, disposing of his material at will and in accordance with a pre-arranged plan of his own.⁴³

Cook and van Iersel have the opposite view of Mark, seeing it as literary text and thus they emphasize the gospel's narrative character.⁴⁴ Kernode also gives a narrative interpretation of this gospel but, unlike Cook and van Iersel, holds that we should not seek in Mark 'the normal accumulations of narrative meaning that we usually consider as the features of a well-developed story'.⁴⁵

Does Mark give a narrative line with a theme or message? I think he does, but Mark stresses exclusively the contradictoriness of the events in Jesus' life. There are gaps in his story with which the reader is expected to do something. He makes, in addition, use of the art of reticence.⁴⁶ Thus the mystery regarding Jesus' identity — called the Messianic secret — is in the foreground until his trial before the Sanhedrin (14: 61-64).⁴⁷ Mark's text is also originally intended to be heard instead of to be read. Therefore, Mark's gospel is not structured in a linear way but in concentric circles, with several repetitions, like a fugue. Cook indicates this as follows:

Mark must be read/heard not simply in a linear fashion that follows the progressive development of the story but at the same time and more profoundly in a concentric or ring fashion that reinforces the memorable dimensions of the story through the kinds of variations and developments of these that one hears in a musical score (as in a fugue).⁴⁸

⁴² V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2.

⁴³ Taylor, *St. Mark*, 105. See also R. Pesch, cited by M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 31.

⁴⁴ B.M.F. van Iersel, *Mark*, 14-29; for Cook see n. 38.

⁴⁵ Kernode, *Genesis*, 141.

⁴⁶ R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, ch. 6.

⁴⁷ The references in the text are to the gospel of Mark.

⁴⁸ Cook, *Christology*, 79, 73. See also van Iersel, *Mark*, ch. 4.

If we read Mark as a *literary* text with a view to his narrative explanation of Jesus as the living Son of God, we cannot dismiss the question of historical criticism.⁴⁹ There is a distinction to be made between *the world behind the text*, Jesus' historical life, and the story of the gospel, *the world of the text*. The term 'world of the text' is intended to mean that the text discloses a horizon of possible experience which the reader can inhabit.

The New Testament scholar N. Perrin maintains that what can actually be reconstructed is not a story but 'occasions' for narration. His thesis is that an original pre-narrative kerymaic proclamation developed into the gospel narrative. Thus the confessional statements about Jesus as the Christ developed into the story about him as we know it from the gospels. An example of this is the following confession in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: 'Christ died for our sins ... he was buried ... was raised on the third day ... appeared to Peter' (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). This is a seed that developed into a story as we find in the gospels, even though Mark is less open and clear in his gospel.⁵⁰

Behind Mark's text are historical clues for a story with its centre in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, which the first Christians experienced as a life-changing power. Mark forges his divergent sources, such as miracle and healing stories, prophecies, apocalyptic traditions and stories of Jesus' suffering into one story, the world of the text. It is a world at a distance from everyday reality, the world of the new Being (Tillich), of the coming Kingdom of God that needs to plant roots in the everyday world of the reader or hearer.

Aside from this world *behind the text* Mark also keeps in view the world *before the text*, that is, the situation of his readers in Rome around 70 A.D. The temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Christians in Rome suffered under the persecution by the emperor Nero. Mark announced that there would be persecutions and pointed to betrayal by family members (13:12), which happened in Rome during Nero's persecutions.⁵¹ That is why Mark paid so much attention to the failures of Jesus' disciples.

To see how Mark explains in a narrative way how Jesus is the living Son of God, we will look at four closely connected aspects of his narrative art. I am borrowing these aspects from Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*.

⁴⁹ Over against Van Iersel who no longer poses the question (Mark, 14-16).

⁵⁰ Ricoeur, 'From Proclamation to Narrative,' 501-12, referring to N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, see also Ricoeur, 'Interpretive Narrative,' *Figuring the Sacred*, 181-87.

⁵¹ Van Iersel, Mark, 24.

These are: the *point of view*, *time*, the *identity of the main character* in the story and the *refiguration of the reader*.⁵²

Point of View

Mark is not a redactor who brings together existing fragments, as Taylor and Pesch hold, but the narrator of a story with a point of view from which he tells his story about Jesus. It is usually so that divergent events are brought together in such a way that a linear pattern of 'beginning, middle and end' can be detected. Mark's gospel has more the structure of concentric circles but the structure of beginning, middle and end is still maintained.

After the prologue, which takes place in the desert of Judea (1:2-13), the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee (1:14-8:26) is the *beginning*. The *middle* is the road from Galilee to Jerusalem (8:27-10:52) and the *end* is in Jerusalem where the betrayal, trial, crucifixion, burial and resurrection occur (11:1-16:8).⁵³

The story is told from the point of view of the third person.⁵⁴ The narrator is invisibly present in every scene and is *all-knowing*. He knows what Jesus' feelings are when healing a leper: 'Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand ...' (1:41). The narrator, like Jesus himself, understands the reactions and motivations of the others and identifies his point of view with that of Jesus. Thus the narrator knows what the thoughts of the teachers of the law are and what those of Jesus are. In the story of the healing of the paralytic we are told how a paralytic was lowered on a litter through an opening in the roof of the house in which Jesus was staying (2:1-12). We also accept that the narrator knows what Jesus is thinking: 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven"' (5). We are told: 'Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"' (6f.). And, again, the narrator knows what Jesus thinks about the ideas of the teachers of the law: 'Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking ...' (8). The narrator can also add events from

⁵² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I, 65-68, 53; II, 88-99; III, 157-79, supplemented by literature on Mark.

⁵³ For an analysis of the structure see Cook, *Christology*, 73-94, and van Iersel, Mark, ch. 4.

⁵⁴ N.R. Petersen, "Point of View" in Mark's Narrative, 97-121.

the past, such as the story of the death of John the Baptist (6:14-29) or anticipate Peter's denial (14: 29-31).

In addition to being all-knowing, the narrator's *value judgement* is also important for his point of view, contrasting with those of the different persons and parties. The evil spirits, the disciples of Jesus, the teachers of the law, the authorities all have their own value judgements. *The question is whether they judge the situation from God's perspective or from the human perspective.* The value judgement of the narrator and that of Jesus are in accordance with God's will. Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God (1:15; 4:11) that is made visible in his own ministry. God's value judgement is the standard, as is indicated by the scolding given to Peter: 'You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men' (8:33). God's will is accented strongly, especially in connection with Jesus' suffering (8:31; 14:36). No one is good, except God (10:18), the only one for whom everything is possible (10:27). He alone bestows the final victory (sitting next to Jesus) (10:40) and He alone knows the day or time of the end (13:32). We are commanded to love with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength this God who sent Jesus (12:30). The context in which Jesus' conflict with his opponents occurs is the struggle between God's promise of life, of the Kingdom of God, and Satan with his power of death and destruction. That is already announced in the prologue in Jesus' temptation by Satan (1:12) and is related further in the casting out of demons (3:23f. and *passim*) and the calming of the storm on the sea (4:35-41). The victory is anticipated by Jesus' resurrection from death as a destructive power (16:1-8) and will be definite at the second coming of the Son of Man (13:24-27).

The narrator wants to make the identity of Jesus clear to his readers, the community of Mark (and later readers as well), in this way: who Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is (1:1), what place suffering had in his life (for example, 8:27-33) and, finally, the impact of the cross and resurrection on the actual situation of the first and later readers. The narrator communicates with the actual reader via the image of the reader that he invokes in his text, the 'implicit reader'. He has the actual reader respond to the text, as we will see below (§4).

Time

Time plays an important role in the narrative and merits special attention. Mark's narrative pulls different levels of time together. The first is that

of *chronological time*, the one episode following another, together with *configurational* or *synthetic time* that forges the events into a story through indicating the plot and the dénouement. The second level occurs within this as *eschatological time* and *historical time* are woven together in a climax. This can be seen in the following way.

Mark introduces a certain line into the story: after the baptism of Jesus his public ministry in Galilee begins in which, on the one hand, he gains authority among the people because of his power to heal the sick and those possessed by demons and, on the other, there is, from the beginning, suspicion towards him among the teachers of the law (1:14-8:26).

The *middle* of the story begins with the departure from Galilee to Caesarea Philippi (8:27f.) and the journey from there to Jerusalem, consisting of the announcement of his suffering and Jesus' explanation to his disciples about why the Son of Man has to suffer. That middle points both back to the beginning — Jesus' public ministry in Judea—as well as forward to the cross and resurrection. We can see that, for example, in the hinge piece between the middle and the end, the healing of the blind Bartimeus (10:46-52). This beggar is a model for faith and stands in contrast with the repeatedly stated blindness of the disciples.

The *end* occurs in Jerusalem. The episode of suffering begins with the anointing in Bethany and Judas' going to the high priests to deliver Jesus to them (14:1-11). After the anointing, Mark brings two different times together in the preparation for the Passover meal. Here he embroiders on Old Testament stories in which God's plan is realized in spite of or because of the hardness of heart of people.⁵⁵ Good examples of this are the Joseph narrative and the David narratives. During the preparation for the Passover meal Jesus predicts his betrayal: '... woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man' (14:21). Here the second level of time enters in.

The announcement that the Son of Man must be betrayed is, according to Ricoeur, a theological statement as well as an event in time. As a theological statement, it points to God's plan: the Son of Man must suffer a great deal (8:31). On the other hand, there are human acts, culminating in Judas' betrayal of him. God's plan *and* the time of the betrayal are indicated by 'the hour'. In Gethsemane Jesus prays 'that if possible the hour might pass from him' (14:35). This prayer is directed in the first instance at God's plan, with the hope that it will not be carried out. This hour, God's 'time', converges with the hours of the events that follow. This 'hour' is, namely, written in the chronology that Mark points to in

⁵⁵ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 33.

the series of three hours of watching: 'Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!' (14:41-42). Eschatological time and historical time merge together here: God's (eschatological) time, the hour in connection with which Jesus prays to the Father that the suffering will pass from him, and the historical time of the contingent human act, the hour that has come because his betrayer is coming.

God's plan is thus not an absolute necessity, given the actions of Jesus' opponents. Van Iersel states: 'Jesus' execution did serve God's intention but in itself was not therefore part of God's intention.'⁵⁶ I agree with him that the 'must' of God is conditional, dependent on human action:

If God wants Jesus' death, it is not because God wants for some reason to see blood but because there are people who wish to eliminate Jesus on account of his message and way of life, and God does not want Jesus to give in to them.⁵⁷

The necessity that lies in the 'must' refers not only to Jesus' suffering but also to his resurrection.

The Identity of Jesus

The narrator emphasizes the valuation of whether what this man Jesus does comes from God or from human beings. The framework in which Jesus' conflict with his opponents occurs is the struggle between the Kingdom of God and Satan with his destructive power. In the climax of that struggle the time of God converges with the time of Jesus' opponents in Gethsemane. By pointing further at the identity of Jesus, Mark gives his narrative explanation that *this Jesus, powerful in word and deed, is the suffering Son of Man*.

Searching for a description of what the identity of a person is, persons have been distinguished from things through being seen as a spiritual substance. Thus, it has been attempted to indicate the unity of the person as permanent through time. The objection is that this is in fact an *x* that is difficult to determine. Such a description therefore falls short, because it does not take into account the relationship of persons with others. If the relationship with others is indispensable for human identity, then permanence through time cannot be described timelessly but as a development,

⁵⁶ Van Iersel, 'Jesus' dood een heilsgebeuren' [Jesus' Death as a Salvific Event], 112.

⁵⁷ Van Iersel, *Mark*, 283f., nt. 4.

in interaction with relationships and circumstances. Therefore, the narrative about a human being is essential.

The identity of someone as a unique person is made visible in a story when we see how he or she responds to circumstances. Events and the person interact in such a way that the events themselves are part of someone's identity and this cannot be seen except by telling someone's story. As Frei remarks:

But I want to claim that in certain narrative or aesthetic contexts, these two things — character and circumstance — belong so closely together that for descriptive purposes we know the person or the persons portrayed through his or their story. This is the case in the last stage of the gospel story ... the person of Jesus, and not only his message, is both indispensable to and known in, the story.⁵⁸

The telling of stories begins already, as we saw in the first section, in everyday life, when people tell their life stories, but is deepened in autobiography, such as, for example, Augustine's *Confessions* show. The identity of the human being is *narrative* because this is not just a chronicle of loose facts threaded together but because of configuration. Primarily because of the plot there is mediation between permanence and change. Ricoeur indicates that as follows:

According to my thesis, narrative constructs the durable properties of a character, what one could call his narrative identity, by constructing the dynamic identity found in the plot which creates the character's identity. So it is first of all in the plot that one looks for the mediation between permanence and change, before it can be carried over to the character.⁵⁹

This establishment of the lasting characteristics, which are discussed here, happens through the telling, in which *narrated time* builds a bridge between lived time and cosmic time. Narrative identity thus arises because of the weaving together of history and fiction. This insight shows how Mark indicates Jesus' identity.

At the beginning of Mark's gospel, at Jesus' baptism by John there is something that only he sees and hears: 'he saw heaven being torn open ... And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love ..."' (1:10-11). At the beginning of the journey to Jerusalem Jesus asks: 'Who do people say I am?' (8:27). That is the central question of the gospel, which is concerned primarily with who he is in relationship to God. Does he embody God's will in his message and life?

⁵⁸ H. Frei, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,' in: *Theology and Narrative*, 37.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, 'Narrative Identity,' 195, cf. also 188; 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 32.

Throughout the narrative the reader is continually made aware of the different valuations of the person and acts of Jesus. The unclean, evil spirits recognized him as 'the Holy One of God' (1:24, 34), the 'Son of God' (3:11; 5:7), but the teachers of the law judged him as a blasphemer (2:7), whereas the disciples respond, when Jesus calmed the storm on the sea: 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!' (4:41). The disciples cannot recognize Jesus' identity because of their lack of understanding and insight and their dullness (8:17, 21). Although Peter answers Jesus' question 'Who am I?' correctly by saying 'You are the Christ' (8:29), he is nevertheless scolded for rejecting the connection to Jesus' suffering (8:31-33).

The three predictions of Jesus' suffering indicate who this Jesus is and his identity: receives narrative form further through the events that lead to the cross and resurrection. Only by following the development of how Jesus responds to the situation of conflict that has arisen is it clear to the reader *who this person is*. Thus, the key to the developments is the conversation with the disciples James and John after the third prediction on lording it over and serving others (10:35-45).

In connection with the request of the disciples to sit on his right and left after his resurrection, Jesus points to his own service. *The mission of the Son of Man is identified with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53*. The announcements of Jesus' suffering are sharpened by the disciples' lack of understanding.

Jesus' road to Jerusalem as the road to the cross gives content to Christological titles like Son of God and Messiah. Jesus' obedience to God is co-determinative for the crucifixion. He decides himself, after all, to go to Jerusalem (19:32). Thus, the story about the road to the cross shows Jesus' *permanent characteristic of being faithful to God and for the reader he acquires the face of the suffering Son of Man*.

Only when he is in Jerusalem, during his trial by the high priests does Jesus declare openly for the first time that he is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, the Son of Man (14:61, 62). Why only then? That has to do with the tension that the reader of Mark experiences between the Jesus who, in Galilee, is powerful in word and deed (3:5, 6:1-6, 8:14-21), casts out evil spirits as powers of death and heals the sick, and the Jesus who is the suffering servant of the Lord through giving his life as a ransom (10:45).⁶⁰ When he is hanging on the cross, he himself cannot escape death: 'He saved others ... but he can't save himself!' (15:31).

With this, the view of Jesus as a divine person is rejected in favour of the view that he is *the suffering Son of Man*. That is why Jesus can declare his Sonship openly during his trial by the Sanhedrin, because it is said in the context of the cross.⁶¹ At the hour of death this declaration is matched by that of the Roman centurion: 'Surely this man was the son of God!' (15:39). Jesus' identity can be expressed by people only if he perseveres in his faithfulness to God in the events that follow on his decision to go to Jerusalem.

We see how Jesus *is* his story. This contrasts with Tillich's language of the New Being. That is too abstract, because Jesus becomes blurred as a person. Jesus is his story and that entails that what is told about him cannot simply be applied to someone else. The identity of Jesus receives its narrative form in the circumstances related by Mark. *Time, fact and individual are here inseparably bound up with one another*. The question of Jesus' identity as the Christ and as the Son of God is inseparably bound up with his actual destiny as the suffering Son of Man. In Jesus Christ power (the struggle against evil) and weakness (suffering) go together for the sake of others. A Christology of glorification that disregards his humiliation is rejected in favour of Christ as the Son of Man who has come 'to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (10:45) and his 'blood ... which is poured out for many' (14:24). The metaphor of ransom indicates that Jesus as the Son of God is the only one who can redeem all of humanity with the blood of his life by making himself the victim of our violence in our place and for our sake.⁶²

Jesus, who declares his Sonship during his trial (14:61-62), dies abandoned by God (15:34), delivered into the power of death. A young man dressed in white (the colour of victory?) in the grave announces at the end the good news of the victory: 'He is risen! He is not here' (16:6). Jesus, as the suffering Son of Man, is the Risen One.

In this way Mark gives his narrative *explanation* that this Jesus is the living Son of God. A narrative explanation cannot, unlike in the natural sciences, be predicted. In history we have to do not only with the actions of people but also with unintended consequences. In the Markan narrative we see a coming together of God's plan and the actions of people. It thus concerns a different kind of explanation than explaining events on the basis of natural law. Von Wright speaks of a quasi-causal explanation, by which he has in mind the 'internal coherence' in a historical

⁶⁰ Cook, *Christology*, 75.

⁶¹ Cook, *Christology*, 91.

⁶² Cook, *Christology*, 88.

story.⁶³ In a historical event we come across coherences that are neither logical nor empirical and thus cannot be fit into the classical division of what is rationally conceivable (knowledge) and what is an empirical fact (opinion). The plot(s) in Mark's narrative has (have) what Ricoeur calls the characteristic of 'discordant concordance', contradictory agreement with each other. This concerns a paradoxical event, something that we had not expected. Mark continues to emphasize the contradictoriness strongly in his narrative. The discordant concordance can be called the logic of historically-based narratives.⁶⁴ Mark's narrative Christology is a unique form of a practice-oriented rationality in which a narrative argument is made.

Is Mark's explanation convincing? That question still needs to be answered. The story is open-ended. It ends in confusion and with the flight of the women. At the grave the women react with trembling and bewilderment and flee from the grave. We could point out that the content of faith is narrative-rational in form and that Mark makes a narrative argument, but whether people are convinced by Mark and his witness of religious Transcendence is another matter.

4. Refiguration: The Narrative Explanation and the Reader

In the introduction to this chapter we referred to the connection between story and life. Human experience has a pre-narrative quality. That is why the story (configuration) arises from life (prefiguration) and conversely the story can flow back into life and in that way becomes lived (refiguration). A narrative such as Mark's invites the reader to let himself be influenced by it.

Ricoeur asks whether the life of someone is not easier to understand if it is explained in the light of the stories that are told about him or her. The act of telling our life stories is the key to the coherence of our lives, which are a mixture of contradictoriness and coherence. A life story becomes more comprehensible when narrative models or plots are applied that are borrowed from fictive or historical stories.⁶⁵ It is, after all, the story that, as 'imitation of the act' (*mimesis praxeos*), gives the life of the reader a plot and brings the heterogeneous elements into a whole. Thus

⁶³ G.H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, 85f., 142f., 153. See also Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I, 132-44.

⁶⁴ Cf. de Boer, 'Klassieke en narratieve theologie', 289.

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, 'Narrative Identity', 188.

Mark's answer to the question of who Jesus is is his gospel narrative so that it will flow back into everyday life. It is not only to be told but also to be lived.

With the help of the reader-response theory I will show how the Markan narrative is intended to transform the life and identity of the reader. As the score of a piece of music can only be heard if performed, thus also the Markan narrative. The reader takes up the act of configuration and completes it by actualizing it in the practice of life. The making of a story (emplotment) is thus the work of text and reader together. That happens in particular when the reader responds to the disciples' lack of understanding of the events.

In his reader-response theory W. Iser argues that a text is indeed the product of an author but is also *a work that is processed by the reader*. The active reader is to fill in the gaps in the story.⁶⁶ As author, Mark communicates with the actual reader (the first, the later and the contemporary reader) via the image of the reader that he creates in his text, which is called the 'implicit reader'.⁶⁷ The 'implicit reader' is thus the intermediary between two consciousnesses, that of the author and that of the actual reader. Reading is like looking at the stars and seeing different patterns in them. Stars are fixed (text) and patterns originate with the reader. I will focus on the role that Jesus' disciples play in Mark's narrative for the reader. For the reader the disciples move from being figures of identification to figures of anti-identification.

Mark initially sketches a positive image of the disciples: they are immediately ready to give up their daily existence and to follow Jesus (1:16-20; 2:13-17). They are Jesus' confidants to whom 'the secret of the kingdom of God has been given' (4:11). They are witnesses to how Jesus casts out demons and heals the sick. They are even sent out to preach and given the power themselves to cast out demons (3:13-19; 6:7-13). Gradually, through their contact with Jesus, their attitude changes and misunderstanding and fear arise. During the storm on the sea Jesus asks them: 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' (4:40). After having experienced the multiplication of bread twice, they still respond the next time they are short of bread with a lack of understanding, in response to which Jesus asks: 'Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?' (8:17).

⁶⁶ W. Iser, *The Act of Reading*, IV. See also J.L. Resseguie, 'Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels', 307-24.

⁶⁷ Iser, *Act of Reading*, 27-38.

How much they become *figures of anti-identification* is apparent when their misunderstanding continues on the way to the cross. Jesus asks them at the beginning of the journey who he, in their view, is (8:29). Peter's denial that the Son of Man must suffer leads to the discourse on true discipleship. The first instruction concerns following Jesus:

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. (8:34-35)

What follows (9:30-10:45) is often called the instruction manual for the community, the key to which lies in the reversal of relationships, through which many who are first will be last and vice versa (10:31). Jesus teaches his disciples to have the attitude of serving instead of ruling (10:35-45). For those outside this circle everything is told in parables (4:11). The disciples themselves prove afterwards to have been the outsiders because they did not understand the Messianic secret: the secret of the hiddenness of God's salvific power is contained in the weakness of the Son of God who, obedient to God's will, gives his life as a ransom for many.

The reader of the story is thus challenged to take a position when his initial figures of identification prove to be figures of anti-identification. Recognizing the failure of the disciples and searching for an alternative is thus, according to Tannehill, a search for the reader for a renewed identity, a new self through which he or she can follow Jesus faithfully as a disciple:

Initial identification is encouraged by positive evaluation of the disciples in the early part of Mark. Identification is encouraged later in the Gospel by the similarity between the problems faced by the disciples and the problems faced by the Gospel's first readers (and, perhaps, by later Christian readers also). But as the inadequacies of the disciples' response to Jesus become increasingly clear, the reader must distance himself from the disciples and begin to seek another way The more clearly the reader sees that the disciples represent himself, the more clearly the necessary rejection of the disciples' behavior becomes a negation of one's past self. The recognition of the disciples' failure and the search for an alternative way become a search for the new self who can follow Jesus faithfully as a disciple.⁶⁸

With the end of Mark's gospel in mind, the flight of the women from the grave, there is still the question of whether the reader has enough of a grip to orient himself. How sharply the behaviour of the disciples deviates

from the norm of the narrator (and of God) is apparent from the suffering narrative. In the major apocalyptic discourse that Jesus gives shortly before his betrayal (13:1-37) he predicts the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which became reality for the first readers in Rome in 70 A.D. In his conversation with his disciples Peter, John, James and Andrew Jesus points to the correct attitude towards the future and urges them to be watchful with respect to the return of the Son of Man (13:33-37). In sharp contrast with his urging is the attitude of the disciples in the days before Jesus' death: the betrayal by Judas, Peter's denial, the failure to watch with Jesus in Gethsemane, all of which culminates in the flight of the disciples and their absence from the scene of the crucifixion and the resurrection. Symbolic for the fleeing disciples is the mysterious report of the fleeing naked young man in Gethsemane, a symbol that also depicts Jesus' absolute abandonment by others (14:51-52).

The crushing of the initially positive image of the disciples contrasts with the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus' head before his burial. The act meets with misunderstanding and resistance from the disciples, but Jesus presents this woman, who performs this ritual of anointing without speaking a word, as a *figure of identification* for the reader: 'I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her' (14:9). The story does not end here but with the *anti-witness* of the women fleeing from the grave.

The wordless witness of anointing by the unnamed woman was not known to the women at the grave. They go, after all, early in the morning to anoint Jesus. The predictions of suffering, in connection with which the concomitant predictions of Jesus' resurrection from the dead continually arise, were also unknown to them or, if they did know about them, they give no indication. They do not, after all, wonder whether Jesus would be there but are only concerned with who would roll the stone away for them.

Gradually, the readers discover that they themselves are *participants in the story*. They must judge *whether* this person Jesus is from God. The close of Mark's gospel (16:1-8) emphasizes this by leaving the end open. There is a contradiction between verses 7 and 8. The young man clothed in white says, recalling Jesus' own promise (16:6): 'He has risen! He is not here.... But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee"' (16:7). This proclamation of hope contrasts sharply with the reaction of the women (8).

The three predictions of Jesus' suffering are continually met by resistance or misunderstanding by the disciples (8:32-33; 9:32-34; 10:35-41),

⁶⁸ R.C. Tannehill, 'The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role,' 395.

which led to new instruction by Jesus (8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:42-45). That resistance is repeated in the reaction of the women to the word of hope spoken by the young man in the grave — they say nothing but flee. The narrator does not respond in any way to the behaviour of the women. Only the reader can complete the tale.⁶⁹ The incomplete ending throws the reader upon himself: Should he then go 'to see the risen Lord'?

In short, Mark's narrative explanation is not compulsory. It asks for a confirmation that concerns the whole person. The reader is asked to complete the story through that which is left undetermined: its latent interpretive richness to give meaning to it in one's own context.⁷⁰ To the reader is left the question of what to do with the open ending: follow him to Galilee or flee with the women.

Narrative Identity

To be able to act people must, according to Hannah Arendt, first have an identity that has been stamped by history. History can disclose the 'who' of an act.⁷¹ For the reader the Markan narrative functions to reflect his fragmentary identity and thus to refigure him. We should recall that the worship service is important for the refiguration of the reader in that it makes salvation present by actualizing it. What Mark relates has, after all, a mythical element. It provides an 'exemplary history' that is fundamentally direction-giving, as is apparent from baptism and communion.

The everyday life of the believer is already stamped by stories. We do not live as blank pages but are already stamped by the stories of the community, such those of the nation or of the smaller communities to which we belong, such as a faith community. Do we not then have a vicious circle if we argue that the narrative, such as Mark's, flows back again into the life of the believer who is already stamped by Bible stories? That is not the case. The story gives, after all, something extra to everyday life and this is a continuing process. New situations in life require being newly stamped by the story, which gives anew something extra. Prefiguration needs continual configuration. Our self-knowledge is mediated precisely by the story because history and fiction are woven through each other and made into a story. This has to do with the hermeneutical circle that

belongs to life. Self-understanding occurs within the hermeneutical circle. This is not to be viewed as a vicious circle but as a spiral because self-understanding is continually deepened by the story. Ricoeur can therefore call narrative identity the solution to the hermeneutical circle:

[Refiguration] is defined by the narrative identity of an individual or a people, stemming from the endless rectification of a previous narrative by a subsequent one, and from the chain of refigurations that results from this. In a word, narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle. (III, 248)

The Markan narrative thus refigures the reader in a continuing process that is to be viewed as a spiral.

To prevent misunderstanding, we should add the following. Narrative identity is not the last word about human identity. Being continually refigured by stories can leave the impression that the human being thus cannot act and cannot take any position. Ricoeur points out that ethics can lead one to step outside one's narrative identity. In certain situations one, with or without the support of a narrative tradition, must say: 'Here I stand. I can do nothing else' (III, 248f.).⁷² It is precisely that which happens in a narrative like that of Mark. The reader is asked to choose to follow or not to follow Christ, also in the situation of persecution, such as obtained for the first readers.

The Assent to the Testimony to Transcendence

What are the consequences of this relationship between narrative and reader for accounting for faith? There is a similarity and a difference between assenting to the testimony to religious Transcendence, such as that in Mark, and other situations in which it is reasonable to assent to them or not. The similarity is that there are criteria for assessing a certain testimony. The historian and the judge each have their own rules for judging whether a testimony is reliable or not. That is also true of the believer. He should judge whether a certain testimony comes from God or not. Mark uses repeatedly a 'criteriology of the divine' when he shows how people judge whether Jesus comes from God or not.

The testimony to religious Transcendence requires the *transformation* of the witness, because at issue here is the assent to something that has

⁶⁹ Van Oyen, 'Het slot van Marcus in het licht van de narratieve kritiek ...' [The Close of the Gospel of Mark in the Light of Narrative Criticism], 45f.

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' 27.

⁷¹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175-92.

⁷² See also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, chs 6-8. T. Heittema emphasizes this aspect of refiguration in his *Reading for Good*, chs 3 and 4.3.

to do with his 'ultimate concern'. Therein lies its difference from a testimony of the kind that a historian or judge must assess. This also makes it different from most testimonies that we accept in everyday life. In judging whether Mark's narrative explanation convinces the reader that Jesus is God's Son, the *whole person comes into view* here. It is a judgement not only of the head but also of the heart. In addition to insight, affectivity plays a role. Mark describes that dramatically as the choice between discipleship or flight. In the following chapter the relationship between affectivity and rationality of the assent to a testimony to Transcendence will be discussed.

The consequence for accounting for faith of the transformation of the reader is that there are no *objective, neutral reasons* for the Christian faith like classical apologetics thought it could supply. The believer is, after all, transformed when he responds to the biblical story. He is partial. The *what* of the faith content determines the *who* of the receiver. Reasons for the Christian faith can be derived only from the faith itself. Both contextualism as well as Alston recognize that, as we saw in the second chapter. Contextualism then draws the conclusion of *fideism*: faith is rational but that is difficult to explain to those who are not part of the circle of that faith. Alston disagrees with this view. Does the transformation of the subject not make the question of whether faith is rational a question that is answerable only within the faith community? In the next chapter we will seek an answer to this question.

In this chapter the central topic was the narrative aspect of the religious experience. Mark's narrative Christology is a unique form of a practice-oriented rationality, in which he argues in a narrative way that Jesus is the living Son of God. The classical view of rationality could not give any room to narrative. In the conclusion to this chapter I will emphasize the rationality of narrative over against the classical view of rationality. That will round off the rationality of the second aspect of religious experience.

5. Narrative and Rationality

Rationality has to do with the form of faith content. It reflects Mark's responsibility 'to strive after clarity, intelligibility and optimal understanding' in his

⁷³ Thus correctly E.J. Kuiper, *Symboliek en hermeneutiek* (Symbolism and Hermeneutics), 1975, chs 3-4.

⁷⁴ Kant, 'Analytic of Cardinal Propositions', Introduction, and first chapter in: *Critique of Pure Reason*, 59-64.

narrative (ch. 3.1). The faith content is, with respect to form, rational-narrative in Mark. He gives an explanation for the actual event that a righteous person dies on the cross but is resurrected from the dead. He gives his explanation by placing Jesus' death in the context of God's eschatological struggle with Satan and his power of destruction. He explains, as an evangelist, why the events have occurred as they did and how power (Jesus' miraculous power against the destructive forces) and weakness (his suffering as sacrifice, as service) are joined in Jesus Christ. In this way he is the Son of God.

Because of the influence of the view of rationality in classical foundationalism, it was difficult for Tillich to explain why a *historical person* like Jesus of Nazareth was of decisive significance for the present. Lessing spoke of an ugly wide ditch that divided the Jesus of history from our own faith. Indeed, it is impossible to span this ditch with a view of rationality whose model is mathematics. Tillich struggled to anchor the Christian faith in history. The person of the historical Jesus can itself not be of absolute value but only that which he mediates as the Christ: the New Being. Under the influence of this rationalistic concept of rationality Tillich sought certainty beyond doubt — a certainty that, by definition, cannot be found in history. For that reason he also prefers the symbol to the story. Religious texts should be interpreted, in his view, not literally but as a religious symbol, as an expression of the relationship of God and human beings. This attention for the vertical relationship occurs at the expense of the 'horizontal' narrative character of the gospels. As a linguistic phenomenon, the text is thus undervalued.⁷⁵

In his *Systematic Theology* Tillich gives a general significance to the story of Jesus of Christ as the bearer of the New Being. In the exegesis of the cross and resurrection the main issue for Tillich is the extent to which they point to God. Thus Tillich speaks of the symbol of the cross and the resurrection, supported by other symbols like miracle stories and the story of the transfiguration. The meaning of such stories is constantly the same: the cross as symbol of the subjection of the bearer of the New Being to the structures of the old existence, to destruction and death. The resurrection is a symbol of the victory in Christ as the bearer of the New Being. This bestows hardly any attention on the *narrative* framework in which these symbols stand. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are not read as a mutually coherent story with a plot. History is therefore only the medium of the revelation of Christ but not its content. Jesus' identity is an ideal identity that hovers somewhat above the temporal event.

In this chapter I have attempted to honour the uniqueness of the rationality of narrative. I attempted to do justice to time, fact, individual and the story as the basic form for reporting human events. Just as stories are used in the Old Testament to talk about God, so stories are used in the New Testament to talk about Jesus. We have received the Christian faith because the gospels were transmitted primarily in narrative form and that is not a matter of chance. Who Jesus is cannot be separated from the narrative told by the four gospels.

The rationality of the narrative can be specified in the following way: telling a story is not arbitrary. Imagination, the capacity for configuration, the art of constructing a story is not an arbitrary matter but an *activity that is guided by rules*. According to Kant's epistemology *the productive imagination* with its schemes mediates between two heterogeneous elements: the concepts of the understanding and that which we observe.⁷⁴ A scheme is a rule or procedure for providing images so that a concept can be applied to sensory facts from outside. Something similar happens in narrative. The narrative bridges heterogeneous elements and brings them into unity. The construction of a plot produces a 'scheme' so that there is a connection between the theme of Mark's narrative — Jesus as the Son of God — and the graphic presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes and the turn in Jesus' destiny that together lead to the dénouement. There is what Ricoeur has called a *schematism of the narrative function* (I, 68). The narrative is a type of schematism that configures human time. Thus Jesus' identity no longer hovers above history but receives its narrative form in the story about him. Through following the coherence of events and Jesus' own choice in that story the reader gradually becomes aware that he is the living Son of God.

This chapter has shown that the narrative is intended to transform the reader and there are therefore no neutral reasons that can be given for faith. The entire person is involved when it comes to accepting faith, not only her head but also her heart, mood and emotion. What role does affectivity place in the acceptance of faith? This will be the topic of the next chapter.

5. AFFECTIVITY AND ASSENT TO A TESTIMONY

After all, man is *not* a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal.
Newman, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, 67

1. Introduction

In accounting for faith most of those who attempt such a project pay little attention to the question of what the role of affectivity, of mood and emotion is in assenting to faith. Many, such as Alston, limit themselves to epistemology, to the question of rationality. Given that we are dealing with people of flesh and blood in these matters, that is far too limited.

Disregard for affectivity in accounting for faith can sometimes be motivated by the fact that emotion is often viewed as irrational. John Locke is an example of this. He views emotion as enthusiasm, in the same sense as when we speak disparagingly of someone as 'an emotional person.' We should not be led by emotions when we are accounting for something like faith. If we want to have beliefs that can be seen as rational we need reasons and our assenting to something does not receive, in his view, any 'evidence' from our 'passions or interests.'¹ As an evidentialist, he argues that one can assent to something only if one has evidence for it. Locke uses the so-called principle of proportionality in the question of assent. The measure of our assent should depend on the kind of evidence that we have for something.²

Locke gives a good indication of the problem that people encounter if they follow his principle. He himself held, namely, that we have the evidence of miracles for the Christian faith. But that only yields a certain measure of probability. Because this evidence has only a certain measure of probability, assent to the faith can be only tentative. That conflicts, however, for many with the certainty of the Christian faith. Faith is a matter of ultimate concern and our commitment to the faith is total. Are these believers therefore irrational?

¹ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.19.1.

² J. Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.16.1. See N. Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, 60–86.

In everyday life we often accept something completely and with certainty while not being able to give indisputable reasons for accepting it. Our commitment often goes beyond the strength of the reasons we can give for that commitment. Our belief that our partners love us is often unconditional, even though we do not have any hard evidence for it. We take it for granted, unless the contrary is shown to be the case. In the midst of all his misery Job says: 'I know that my Redeemer lives.' Is it irrational to assent to something, if we cannot produce any indisputable arguments for assenting to it?

In assenting to a belief the weighing of reasons for and against does indeed play a role. But there is more involved here. We should not think of faith as (simply) an intellectual affair, for faith concerns the whole person. If we argue, as I do, that affectivity plays a role in assent, does that then mean that faith is arbitrary, as Locke holds? That depends on how we view the relationship between affectivity and knowledge and reason and in particular with respect to the assent to faith.

In the Christian tradition Pascal, Edwards, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Newman and James, although with very divergent emphases, have indicated the importance of affectivity for religion — precisely in connection with the assent to faith. I will do the same in this chapter.

Affectivity plays an important role in the Jewish and Christian religions. According to Scripture, the heart is the seat of knowledge and affectivity. God reveals himself to the prophets in the Old Testament not only as someone who gives orders and expects obedience but also as someone who is moved affectively by what happens in the world. As God says through the prophet Isaiah: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite' (Isaiah 57:15). A.J. Heschel points out that, according to the Hebrew prophets, God has not only intelligence and will but also pathos.³ The Stoic ideal was apathy, but that of the prophets was 'sym-pathos.' The pathos of God is reflected in the attitude, hope and prayers of the prophet. God's business is his business and his answer to God expresses his sympathy.⁴ The New Testament also speaks of God and human beings in affective terms. The first witnesses, the women at the grave, respond primarily affectively. They were overcome by 'trembling and bewilderment' and their emotion turned into action: they 'fled from the tomb.' The apostle Peter calls the believer to

an entirely different mood, that of the joy of the faith (I Peter 1:8). It thus makes a huge difference, according to W. James, whether people accept the world 'in the drab, discolored way of stoic resignation to necessity or with the passionate happiness of the Christian saints.'⁵

Emotion and mood are indispensable in religious experience. I therefore describe religious experience as an experience in which the human being is affectively involved with Transcendence (ch. 3.4). In this chapter I will investigate how affectivity (emotion and mood) plays a role in accounting for faith and how we can describe assent to a testimony to religious Transcendence on that basis.

The conclusion of the previous chapter was that the believer is transformed in his response to the biblical story and can therefore give reasons for his faith only as someone who is *partial* to that faith. Neutral reasons for the Christian faith do not exist. The *what* of the faith content determines the *who* of the receiver as well as the *how* of her assent to it, as we will see. The Markan narrative is intended to transform the reader. The narrative stamps the person as a whole. That raises the question of how affectivity is related to knowledge and reason. What is the relationship between affectivity and rationality in assenting to a testimony to Transcendence?

In this chapter I will show that *faith knowledge* is *affective knowledge*, knowledge of the heart. What that entails can be best clarified by the layer theory of affectivity. We do get very far with respect to affectivity by speaking only about emotion. In addition to emotion, mood is also important in our affective life and both have a role to play in faith knowledge. Therefore I use the term affectivity as an umbrella term for both emotion and mood.

The human heart is the intersection point at which mood and emotion come together with knowledge and action. I will clarify that by means of the layer theory of affectivity, in which I will make liberal use of, among others, S. Strasser's *Phenomenology of Feeling*. The layered affectivity of the human being demonstrates that the heart is the intersection point of an affectivity consisting of mood and emotion. That can be illustrated in a preliminary way by an image Strasser uses of a fountain.⁶

The water in the basin forms a yet undifferentiated mass, comparable to *mood*. The water is subsequently divided into streams and sprayed

³ A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* II, 4.

⁴ A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* II, 88.

⁵ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 41. The references in the text are to this work.

⁶ S. Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*, 186f.

upwards in different directions. Together, the streams are an image of our reflective consciousness with which we direct ourselves towards things, our intentional acts. The water of the directed streams stands for emotion, affective knowing and action. These streams, divided in different directions, fall back again into the basin. This is the process of the mixing and precipitation of the experiences. When the drops are received by the water in the basin, they are reunited into an undifferentiated mass. This is the process of reintegration. The basin is the centre from which everything arises and to which everything falls back. It is the heart as the intersection of all layers.

To show that faith knowledge is affective knowledge and that affectivity has a role to play in assenting to a testimony to Transcendence, I will proceed in the following way. First, we will discuss *emotion*. Contemporary philosophy of psychology is devoting a great deal of attention to emotion. Is emotion something arbitrary and irrational, as claimed by the classical feeling theory found in Hume? Is it of an entirely different nature than understanding, as James argued, or does it have a cognitive dimension, as De Sousa and others argue? We will investigate how insights from the theory of emotion can be applied to religious emotion. Emotion appears to be an aspect of affective faith knowledge (§2). Next, we will see that affectivity includes more than emotion and that the *affective experience is layered*. An example of a layered affective religious experience can be found in Schleiermacher. Faith knowledge as affective knowledge appears to be layered (§3). These insights about affectivity will, finally, be made fruitful for answering the question of how we are to understand assent to religious Transcendence (§4).

2. Religious Emotion

The Feeling Theory

Affectivity is sometimes seen as irrational. Is emotion not diffuse? Are people not often swept away by their emotions, and thus no longer open to (rational) argument? Religion is also sometimes viewed as a subjective feeling without any sense that it represents a truth for which one stands and without any ethical ideal. Thus religion is simply arbitrary: one can relegate it to one's private life and it is no longer important for the public square. This view of emotion is often theoretically supported by

the so-called feeling theory found in, for instance, René Descartes and David Hume. This theory views emotion as a subjective, inner feeling. Only those who experience emotion have direct access to it, Hume shows this in the following way.

In his *A Treatise of Human Nature* Hume describes emotion as an 'impression', as something given through a sensation.⁷ He uses the term 'impression' to emphasize the passive aspect of emotion. It is an inner feeling passion to emphasize the passive aspect of emotion. It is an inner feeling that is not connected to an idea or judgement and therefore does not arise through a cognitive activity. It can be compared with the feeling of being hungry or thirsty:

A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification. When I am angry, I am actually possessed with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick or more than five foot high. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this passion can be oppos'd by, or be contradictory to truth and reason: since this contradiction consists in the disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent.⁸

Emotions such as anger are like physical feelings such as thirst or hunger. According to Hume, emotion reflects only a physiological causal connection to an object. That is why, in the above quotation, he denies that emotion is cognitive. It cannot be 'contradictory to reason,' because it is of another order than that of reason.

Is there a real difference, one can ask, between toothache and anger towards someone? Let us take the following example. 'John is deceived by Jim and, consequently, John becomes angry.' In Hume's view, one can only point to the cause of the emotion anger. Like toothache, anger is caused by something, but beyond that it does not provide any information about its object. There is, in other words, no intrinsic relationship between this specific situation or this 'object' (Jim's deception) on the one hand and the emotion of anger on the other. Hume cannot explain why deception does not lead to happiness. Emotion as 'sensation' cannot, according to him, contradict an idea, because emotions and ideas belong to different orders. That is correct, but the question is whether emotion should be viewed as sensation in Hume's sense. That the emotion of anger is connected with this object or this situation of deception we know, according to Hume, only from repeated experience, but we cannot explain

⁷ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 277.

⁸ Hume, *A Treatise*, 415.

this with respect to the content of the emotion. There is no intrinsic connection between a certain emotion and a certain object. The emotion cannot, therefore, give us any information about the object of the emotion, not, therefore, explain why we are angry or happy or Jim's deception. This approach cannot explain why we are angry or happy in one situation and in another not.⁹ We can only establish, through a repeated sensation, the combination of certain situations and objects and the corresponding emotion.

Applied to religious emotion, this view entails that religious emotion is arational. Locke was influenced by this view and therefore held that we, in assenting to a testimony to religious Transcendence, should not allow ourselves to be led by our emotions.

W. James has a view of emotion or feeling that is related to Hume's but with the difference that, according to him, emotion or feeling is a source of knowledge distinct from the understanding. Our passionate nature contains, among other things, insight-giving passions. And that obtains also for religion. James speaks as follows about religion as feeling:

It is as if there were in the human consciousness a *sense of reality*, a *feeling of objective presence*, a *perception* of what we may call '*something there*,' more deep and more general than any of the special and particular '*senses*' (55)

This feeling resembles more a sensory sensation than an activity of the intellect (59, 66f.). It discloses a kind of *non-conceptual knowledge*, through which feeling, in distinction from the intellect, is accorded the status of being a source of knowledge in itself. The 'fruit' that religion yields James calls saintliness.

One of the characteristics of saintliness is the 'feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests' (219). Further, 'a sense of the friendly continuity of the ideal power with our own life, and a willing self-surrender to its control' and 'a shifting of the emotional centre towards loving and harmonious affections, towards "yes, yes," away from "no," where the claims of the non-ego are concerned' (220). Situations of mystical consciousness give knowledge to the person in question and indeed are 'states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect' (302).

Feeling as personal experience is thus fundamental for religion. In this James defines feeling in clear terms over against 'theological and philosophical formulas' that he considers to be secondary (cf. e.g. 34, 341-42).

⁹ Hume, *A Treatise*, 368.

For James, feeling is often the same as emotion. By emotions he understands phenomena that accompany palpable bodily symptoms. James' theory of bodily upset is thus a variation on Hume's theory of feeling. James indicates how fundamental physiology is for emotion in the following way:

My thesis ... is that the *bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion* [W]e feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike of tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be.¹⁰

Emotions have to do with physiological patterns of response. The accents lie on the felt effect, thus with emotions that accompany a physical reaction, such as surprise, ecstasy and rage. This view does not take account of emotions such as hope and desire. There is first the felt physical reaction (danger) and only then the emotion (fear). Emotions are mental feelings that are caused by bodily changes.

According to James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, emotions and feelings are something entirely different from ideas that are determined by a language with its (cultural) traditions. They are independent of concepts and beliefs. No reasons can be given for them. James does acknowledge that there is a relationship between emotion and a fact or object but denies that the relationship is rational or intrinsic. Therefore he points to the fact that facts lend themselves to contradictory emotions. The same fact arouses entirely different feelings in different people and at different times in the same person (126). The conditions that lead to certain feelings and emotions are therefore not logical or cognitive but organic. In the case of the passion of love, for example, '[i]f it comes, it comes; if it does not come, no process of reasoning can force it' (126).

James on Religious Emotion

How does James apply his insights on emotion to *religious emotion*? What is said here in general about natural emotions is also true, in his view, for religious emotion. A religious emotion is feeling plus a certain kind of object, as he says:

There is religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy, and so forth. But religious love is only man's natural emotion of love directed to

¹⁰ W. James, 'What is an Emotion?' 170.

a religious object; religious fear is only the ordinary fear of commerce, so to speak, the common quaking of the human breast, in so far as the notion of divine retribution may arouse it; religious awe is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, or in a mountain gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations; and similarly of all the various sentiments which may be called into play in the lives of religious persons. As concrete states of mind, made up of a feeling *plus* a specific sort of object, religious emotions of course are psychic entities distinguishable from other concrete emotions, but there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract 'religious emotion' to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself, present in every religious experience without exception. (31)

It is striking that James connects religious emotion here with a special object. That was precisely where Hume's theory fell short, since it did not make this connection. However, James does not specify the relationship between emotion and object any more closely. We saw in the preceding that he did not see any intrinsic relationship between an emotion and its object. An emotion arises, after all, as a physiological pattern of response. It is a mental feeling caused by a physical change. James sees little difference between religious emotion and natural emotion. Religious feelings differ only in intensity from natural feelings. Is that correct?

James points to something important, namely that a religious emotion is not superficial but affects the human being in his entirety. Religion has to do with one's *ultimate concern*. The difference between religious and natural affectivity is, however, more than simply a difference in intensity. In the above quotation James does supplement this by saying that a *religious emotion is a natural emotion that is directed towards a religious object*. That is precisely the problem that I raised in the third chapter. The relationship with God is not intentional, not involvement with an 'object', but trans-intentional. Before I go into this more deeply, we need to look more closely at the question of whether emotion can be so clearly distinguished from the intellect, whether viewed arationally (Hume) or with its own epistemic function (James). Should the cognitive function of emotion not be emphasized more than James does?

The Cognitive Component Theory

The views of Hume and James conflict with the way in which we have emotions. Someone sees a growling pit bull coming at him, whereupon he becomes afraid and tries to get away. I would say, in line with Aris-

totle, that the fear of the growling pit bull rests on a *judgement*, on the assessment that danger threatens. Aristotle held that the *judgement* of the person involved always plays a role in emotion. He calls emotion a modification or interpretation of pain or pleasure on the basis of certain *judgements* about the world. He thus sees an intrinsic connection between an emotion and its object in that the emotion provides information about the object.

An emotion consists in different components: the state of mind of someone who experiences an emotion, the object of the emotion and the relevant grounds for the emotion. In a different way from Hume, Aristotle explains why a certain behaviour causes anger. In his book on rhetoric he states this as follows:

The emotions [*pathê*] are those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments and which are accompanied by pain and pleasure, for example, anger, pity, and other such things and their opposites. There is need to divide the discussion of each into three headings. I mean, for example, in speaking of anger, what is their *state of mind* when people are angry and against *whom* are they usually angry, and for what sort of *reasons*; for if we understood one or two of these but not all, it would be impossible to create anger [in someone]. And similarly, in speaking of the other emotions.¹¹

In addition to the felt state, the reference to the object and the beliefs that provide the grounds for the emotion are also indispensable for determining the emotion. The felt state can be specified according to its physical and mental aspects.

When one sees a growling pit bull, the following happens with respect to the emotion of fear: 1) an unpleasant sensation in which the situation is assessed (the pit bull as dangerous); 2) physically detectable feelings such as the pounding of one's heart or the feeling that one's heart is in one's throat; 3) the psychological feeling of tightness in the chest; 4) a strong inclination to act in a certain way, in this case to flee.¹² These different things happen while experiencing an emotion: the physiological and psychological state of the one experiencing the emotion, a cognitive aspect (the assessment of the growling as danger) and a certain behaviour.

¹¹ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1378a.

¹² For a similar example and discussion of the different theories of emotion see W. P. Alston, 'Emotion and Feeling,' 478-86. For a general orientation in this area see A. Rorty (ed.), *Explaining Emotions* and H. Pott, *De tiefde van Alcibiades* (The Love of Alcibiades).

The direction in which Aristotle points is being developed further in contemporary theories of emotion. With respect to this biology, particularly evolutionary biology, is yielding new facts about being human: our emotions are rooted in our biological nature. Neurobiologists emphasize strongly that our emotions are as universal as our nature. In contrast, social constructivists place the accent on the cognitive aspect of emotion and its being culturally determined.¹³ Freud's view of the human consciousness is also important for describing emotion. Psychoanalysis raises the question of whether we are indeed able to assess the object correctly in our emotional response to it, whether we do not suppress its meaning, which thus leads to our being unable to know the object truly. We can, for example, judge someone in a negative way on the basis that she has bad taste. Further investigation might reveal that we disapprove of her not because of her bad taste but because she is of a different race.

An emotion consists, as is apparent from the example of the pit bull, of both physical and mental components. A cognitive component theory attempts to do justice to all components. De Sousa summarizes the contributions of the different theories as follows:

From the feeling theory, we must retain the importance of the felt quality. From behaviorism, we must remember that most emotions are intrinsically tied to the organization of our capacities for action, interaction, and reaction. But the evolutionary perspective suggests that those capacities have roots far older than our birth, even when they are most specific to particular individuals. We also need to explore further the fact that for most emotions to be worthy of the name, some physiological change must be involved. The cognitive theory draws our attention to the constitutive role of information. And we must take account of the fact that passion, in spite of its reputation for passivity, is sometimes the very embodiment of the will.¹⁴

A cognitive theory of emotions seems to give the most adequate description of having emotions. It includes the following components in an emotion: 1) the physiological state of the subject; 2) her psychological state; 3) the cognitive and rational component; 4) the behaviour or intention to behave in a certain way. Not all of the components are always present when experiencing an emotion. For example, in the case of hope there is no physiological state. Sometimes the behaviour connected to an emotion does not occur, going no further than the expressed intention. Pity can lead to help but can also be limited to expressing good intentions. Is there a defining characteristic for speaking about an emotion? That is the cognitive element. Let us now turn to that.

¹³ For this discussion see Port, *De lieftde*, 126-34.

¹⁴ R. de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, 46. On the cognitive theory of emotion see R.C. Solomon, *The Passions* and M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*.

The Cognitive Component of Emotion

In his *Action, Emotion and Will* A. Kenny specifies further the intentionality of an emotion towards an object.¹⁵ In this he employs the scholastic distinction between the formal and the material object. The *material object* of, for example, 'stealing' consists in everything that can be stolen such as money and goods. All these things become the *formal object* only when there is the belief that they have been stolen. This applies analogously to emotions. The material object of fear is constituted by everything that can be feared. Something becomes a formal object of fear through our judgement that it causes fear. The formal object always refers therefore to a belief. The involvement with an object is thus more closely defined as an intrinsic relation. A certain emotion belongs to a certain object or a certain situation. Therefore, the emotion always reflects the assessment of the value of an object. A growling pit bull will cause fear in most people. But the growling will probably not cause this emotion in the pit bull's owner. His belief, his assessment of the growling is different.

This brings us further than the theory of emotion found in Hume or James, according to which emotions are subjective modifications of the state of mind that are merely coincidentally connected with an object. James does speak about emotion as a source of knowledge but does not elaborate further on this. We cannot speak correctly about emotions without referring to the objects of emotions, about which emotions entail an evaluative judgement. According to Kenny and De Sousa, the identity of an emotion is necessarily connected to the identity of its formal object. There is an intrinsic relationship between a certain type of emotion and a certain type of situation or object.

In connection with this, De Sousa points to the *focal property* of the emotion.¹⁶ The focal property is that which attracts our attention to someone or something and invokes the emotion. *Emotions are a way of perceiving.*

We appear sometimes to be not aware of why we make a certain value judgement. Sometimes, it is because we have the wrong information. Wendy, whom De Sousa uses as an example, despises Bernie for his bad musical taste — so she claims. The truth is that Bernie's voice reminds her of her grandmother whom she did not like very much. Or we could use the following example: we admire someone because he played in the orchestra already when he was only six years old. But that judgement appears

¹⁵ For this and what follows see A. Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will*, 60, 187-202.

¹⁶ For this and what follows see De Sousa, *Rationality*, 116-22.

afterwards to be based on the wrong information. Despisement and admiration emerge here from an incorrect assessment of the situation. Therefore De Sousa adds a 'condition of intelligibility'. Our evaluation of the situation must be to the point. Despisement and admiration must be connected with the assessment about musical taste and not with matters that have nothing to do with that. This assessment should be based on factually true information. In this connection De Sousa, like Kenny, speaks about the formal object of the emotion. The formal object defines the circumstances in which it is fitting or rational to have the emotion. It points to the standard of correctness.

De Sousa's and Kenny's analyses show that emotions have a rational aspect so that we can give *reasons* for why we have certain emotions and not others in certain circumstances. This clarifies, among other things, that an emotion can sometimes be incorrect because the judgement on which it rests is incorrect. Our emotion can appear to be groundless if we judge a particular situation in the wrong way. Whether or not we show pity, indignation, anger, love, etc. not only reveals to others who we are but also gives us insight into a certain situation. For the person involved they can show us how to act (or not act) in accordance with the emotion. Emotions that are related to (formal) objects are then also to be viewed as forms of rule-guided behaviour. *Emotions have a learning aspect because of paradigm scenarios*. As a child we learn how certain situations invoke certain emotions. That sense is strengthened by movies, theatre, literature and TV series. To a certain extent we learn, with respect to a certain situation, what the object of a certain type of emotion is and the appropriate response to that situation.¹⁷

We should introduce a caveat here. We run the risk of intellectualism if the cognitive component of emotion is one-sidedly emphasized. The impression can arise that the human being is an intellectual being and shows his emotions like a trained dog. Human beings are often ambivalent and have mixed feelings about the same object. Our heart is caught in the conflict sometimes between choosing for instinctive pleasure and at other times for the good and beautiful.¹⁸ That is why Kant calls the human being 'crooked timber.' We also have emotions sometimes that are ambivalent. We do not admire someone else's achievements very much if the latter threaten our own position. We are then tossed between admiration and aversion.¹⁹ Sometimes people consciously choose values that

¹⁷ De Sousa, *Rationality*, 182.

¹⁸ Plato, *The Republic IV*, 434d-445e.

¹⁹ P. S. Greenspan, 'A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion,' 223-50.

are at right angles to what others consider to be of value. The chief character in Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* wants 'instinctively to live, to exercise all the aspects of life ... and not just reason, which amounts to perhaps one-twentieth of the whole.' The human being can, he argues, also wish for something that is harmful to him.

I refer the reader to the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, i.e. Newman's statement that the human being is not a reasoning animal. We are such that we often do not act entirely according to our rational insights. Emotion is, after all, according to the component theory, more than an evaluative belief. There are other components, such as behaviour, physical and mental feelings. Therefore, with P. Goldie I do not want to limit the intentionality of the emotion to an evaluative belief. One can have a belief without feeling anything in connection with that belief. That is why Goldie proposes speaking of emotion as 'feeling towards'.²⁰ Emotions are indeed intentional, but they also have the component of feeling. That is why we are not always in control of our emotions. 'Feeling towards' something is not the same as giving an objective, neutral judgement on the basis of evidence. Emotion includes the reflective element of judgement but at the same time reveals something of my inner being.

Emotion as Part of the Affective Faith Knowledge

Is the cognitive component theory applicable to *religious emotion*? The problem is that the intentionality of the emotion, its orientation to an object, is difficult to detect in religious experience, because God is not given to us as an object. If, as I argued in the third chapter, experience is exclusively intentional, one cannot speak of religious experience (§2). Does P. Järveläinen provide a solution in his *A Study on Religious Emotions* for the problem of the intentionality of religious emotions?

Järveläinen distinguishes cognitive, depth- and pragmatic dimensions in religious emotion.²¹ The first is an idea about the divine. The second points out that a religious emotion is a deep existential experience and the third indicates that such an emotion is connected with a certain faith community with its liturgy and religious customs.

²⁰ P. Goldie, *The Emotions*, 18f., 58-62.

²¹ P. Järveläinen, *A Study on Religious Emotions*, ch. 2.

Järveläinen sees religious emotions as specific cases of natural emotions, in addition to the feeling component, he also points, following in the footsteps of De Sousa, to the cognitive element. He does not, in connection with this, take up the problem of the intentionality of emotion for religious emotion. That raises the question of how precisely one can indicate the difference between religious and natural emotions. Is it a solution to view religious emotions as *something other than* specific cases of natural emotion?

In his *Das Heilige* R. Otto emphasizes that religious affectivity differs from natural affectivity. He remarks that Christians, because of their mood of piety and emotion, encounter feelings 'that we to a lesser extent encounter in other areas: feelings of gratitude, trust, love, surrender, of humble subjection and acceptance.' But that, according to him, is somewhat different from the 'entirely unique characteristics ... of the solemnly pious.'²² The divine that is a mystery, the divine that fascinates and causes trembling, he calls the numinous. He distinguishes different elements in the numinous, to which something in our inner being corresponds, but it constantly reflects things that cannot be specified by identical feelings but only by *corresponding* feelings. Otto thus points to the *autonomy* of religious experience, with the consequence that religious affectivity is not a specific form of affectivity in general. He works this out further by calling the holy an *a priori* category à la Kant.²³ The 'capacity for divination' is part of human nature, i.e. the capacity to discern and recognize the holy truly in the phenomenon.²⁴

In my view, religious emotion is in this view too much isolated from natural emotion because of the speculation concerning the capacity for divination. One can thus no longer speak of religious emotion but only advise others to experience it. Religious experience is thus made immune to possible critique.

With Järveläinen I consider religious emotion to be a specific example of natural emotion but I do want to emphasize more what belongs properly to religious emotion. *Religious experience* is, in essence, as I argued in chapter 3, *trans-intentional*. *The relationship with God is asymmetrical and therefore not an intentional relationship* (ch. 3.2). God encompasses the human being and is closer to him than the human is to himself. The boundary between God and us is continually our boundary

and not God's boundary. Whenever we speak about an I-Thou relationship with him, the Thou encompasses the I and thus the whole relationship.²⁵ This asymmetrical relationship affects the human being in his heart. This moment of being touched does not exist separately from everything else but occurs in and through the life world of the human being. We are not conscious of a pure self — as pursued in Zen meditation — but we stand in relationship to something in our life world. Religious experience occurs in everyday life with its intentionality for life. It occurs in and to our world. And that obtains also for emotion.

Whenever we speak of religious emotion, we are dealing, on the one hand, with a relationship to an object (the intentionality of the emotion) and, on the other, with a transcending of it in a 'cosmic disclosure', an insight through which something suddenly receives a reference to God. Religious emotion differs from natural emotion in that it is involved with religious Transcendence. Gratefulness towards doctors for the success of an operation — natural emotion — can at the same time be a religious emotion if we are grateful to God as well.

In short, the cognitive component theory can be applied to religious emotion, if the qualification is added that the intentional aspect of the emotion is upheld — we have emotions in and through concrete situations. At the same time, however, religious emotion is trans-intentional in its disclosure and refers to God.

Religious emotion thus has a learning aspect to it. The paradigm scenarios are passed on primarily by the faith communities. And these are influenced by the Biblical narrative, church doctrine and the experiences of people. That yields a colourful palette of religious affectivity: sombre Protestants, cheerful Evangelicals, and optimistic Catholics. It also influences the way in which we assent to the faith. *Thus emotion is an important part of faith knowledge as affective knowledge.*

As readers of the Markan narrative, we are asked to choose via the responses of the disciples (ch. 4). The choice to assent or not to the testimony of Mark is sharpened by the open end of the narrative. The women at the grave do not believe the testimony of the young man clothed in white and indicate that affectively: 'Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid' (Mark 16:8). According to the feeling theory this response would be irrational. But this explanation conflicts with the fact that the circle around Jesus gradually reacted to him negatively. The

²² R. Otto, *Das Heilige*, 8.

²³ Otto, *Das Heilige*, 132.

²⁴ Otto, *Das Heilige*, 166.

²⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 301.

response of the women corresponds to that entirely. A cognitive component theory of emotion gives a better explanation of the reaction of the women by pointing to their evaluative judgement of the report given by the young man dressed in white. That determines their negative emotion of trembling, fear and flight. Different elements of the emotion can be indicated: their perception that assessed the young man's report as incredible, the physical feeling (trembling) and the psychological feeling (fear) that arises because of the negative assessment of the women and, finally, the resultant behaviour (flight).

James pointed out that facts lend themselves to opposite emotional responses and the same fact can cause entirely different feelings in different people and, at different times, in the same person. That is correct, but James' conclusion is not. This does not show that there is no intrinsic relationship between emotion and object in our example. Mark wants the reader to come to a different assessment and thus, unlike the women, to an affective assent to this testimony to religious Transcendence.

However important emotion is, affectivity includes more. We do not get very far with the term emotion if we want to describe the whole affective dimension of religious experience. That is a shortcoming of studies such as De Sousa's, which is limited in fact to emotion, as if that is the extent of our affectivity. We also have feelings that do not have direct objects. Boredom is a good example. Are we bored *about something* in the same way in which we can be cheerful about something? Boredom is not an emotion in the sense described above. It lacks a concrete object. It has to do with the experience of our reality as a whole. Boredom is a *mood* and not an emotion. People often ignore the distinction between mood and emotion. For example, in her informative discussion of emotion, Pott does not make its distinction from mood very clear. When she speaks about emotions and the crisis of reason, she is talking rather about mood and not about emotions.²⁶ Love can be an emotion, involved as it is with someone. But closer inspection can show that love can exist where there is no concrete 'object' for it. Love can also be a mood. Affectivity is layered: in addition to emotion, it also includes mood. That is an insight to which the philosophical phenomenology of Heidegger, Bollnow, Strasser and Ricoeur have pointed.

We have seen that emotion is not arational, as Locke and Hume assert, but has a cognitive component. It is an aspect of affective faith knowledge. Affectivity is, however, more than emotion. We will see in the next

paragraph that mood precedes emotion (ontologically) and that mood and emotion converge with knowledge and action in the human heart. Faith knowledge proves to be affective knowledge.

3. Layered Affective (Religious) Experience

The notion of a layered affectivity comes easily to mind, if we think about how many different meanings our language has for the word feeling. In all its gradations, they appear to be significant for religion as well.

1. *Sensory feelings* to indicate something like the sense of touch; this has to do with the human organism. This sensory aspect is indispensable for liturgy.

2. *Psychological or mental feelings*. We ascribe feeling to other senses, through which a transfer of the feeling to one's internal being occurs. We do not literally feel with our eyes or ears, but we are moved internally and have feelings of pity or joy. I will use the terms psychological or mental for these feelings to distinguish them from sensory feelings. Religious feelings or emotions, such as gratitude, also fall under this category.

3. *Feeling of life or mood* as the unity of many feelings. We are disposed to be sombre or cheerful. A person can also be disposed to be religious, for example, in her feeling that she is absolutely dependent on God or by living on the basis of an absolute trust.

Affectivity functions in a stratified or layered way in human beings — as has been shown by Scheeler, Strasser and Heron.²⁷ Human beings have moods, but they also have emotions or feelings. We sometimes react instinctively; we sometimes let ourselves be guided by moods or react emotionally to a situation. Not only emotion but also mood influences our rational thought and our behaviour. The human being is a whole of *bios*, *pathos* and *logos*. Viewing affectivity as layered is an attempt to do justice to the different aspects of our humanness.

In what follows I will demonstrate that the affective dimension of (religious) experience is layered. The first layer is that of *mood* and is *pre-intentional*, because we cannot yet speak of an opposition of human being

²⁶ Pott, *De liefde*, ch. 7.

²⁷ M. Scheeler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die Materiale Werthik*; S. Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*; J. Heron, *Feeling and Personhood*. See also J. W. van Saane, *De rol van gevoelens en emoties in de religieuze beleving* [The Role of Feelings and Emotions in Religious Experience], ch. 5.

and world, of involvement with a specific object. The second layer is that of *emotion*, which I have already discussed, and is *intentional*, characterized by involvement with a specific object outside the consciousness. We will see that the division between the layers is not fixed and that there is interaction between the layers. The identity of the human being lies in the *heart*, in which the layers of affective experience, mood and emotion as well as judgement converge. The criterion for distinguishing between the layers is the extent to which we can speak of intentionality. I will first give a short description of layered affectivity in general (3.1) and then discuss an example of layered religious experience as found in Schleiermacher (3.2).

3.1. Layered Affectivity

The Pre-Intentional Layer: Mood

Mood refers to pure feeling, pure in distinction from a directed feeling like an emotion. We can be happy about something (happiness as an emotion), but we can also have a happy mood without there being a direct object that leads to our being happy. Mood is pre-intentional and is to be distinguished from emotion which is involved with an object. Nor can we say that mood is an action. Strasser therefore calls mood (disposition) a 'felt state of mind, pure being-in-a-mood.'²⁸ Mood is viewed here in the first instance as a property of our humanness and not in terms of the psychological fact that we are sometimes put out by adversity and are 'in a bad mood.'

Mood refers first of all to our 'state-of-mind': we find ourselves in the world having a mood (*gestimmt*). The mood discloses our existence. That is our 'throwness' in existence. We find ourselves in existence not first by an act of perception but as 'finding ourselves having a mood.' Mood is neither within nor without but discloses the way in which we are in the world. We could thus say that the landscape is cheerful. Strasser points out that mood transcends the relationship of a subject to an object in that the I and the world are embedded in an undifferentiated total experience. 'Disposition is the feeling of I-and-world together.'²⁹

Mood is pre-intentional. That differs not only from the theoretical intentionality of a subject involved with an object but also from the pre-theoretical intentionality of our contact with things as instruments in everyday life. It is something like what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'functioning intentionality' of the pre-reflective consciousness. By this he means the intentionality that grounds the natural, pre-predicative unity of the world and of our lives.³⁰ Reality is disclosed to us in mood and we are originally involved with the world. If we are in a cheerful mood, then everything appears to us in rosy colours, and if we are sombre, then we see everything as drab. Mood is an 'everything feeling'.

The fact of a pre-intentional mood is important for the role we ascribe to knowledge in our lives. Mood brings something to light that cannot be discovered in the pure theoretical attitude towards knowing, i.e. the unity of human and world supplied in mood. The human consciousness is not only just a reflective object-consciousness but is also pre-reflective. Intentionality, directing oneself towards, is possible only because of the original disclosing of reality by mood.³¹ *Theoretical knowledge is therefore not an original relationship with things but is grounded in the more original practical relationship of the human being to her world.* Theoretical knowledge has been developed from practical knowledge, pre-theoretical understanding.

Mood as a property of our humanness expresses our belonging to being. This feeling of belonging to being is the *ontological feeling*. Just like a psychological feeling, it is affectively charged but differs from the former in that it indicates a property of our humanness: our connection with our (life) world. It is a basic feeling of the human being.

Heidegger calls fear the mode of our basic feeling or mood. Bollnow holds that no specific mood is primary. The cheerful mood, happiness, is just as basic as fear.³² According to Ricoeur, yearning and love express the fundamental connection between the human being and the world.³³

The Intentional Layer: Knowledge, Action and Emotion

In knowledge, action and emotion we direct ourselves towards something. Unlike the previous layer, here we are talking about the reflective

²⁸ Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*, 183. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §29.

²⁹ Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*, 188.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Avant-Propos, xiii.

³¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 176.

³² O.F. Bollnow, *Das Wesen der Stimmungen*, 171 and Part 2: 'Glück und Zeitlichkeit.'

³³ P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 89.

consciousness with its intentionality. An example of an affective form of *knowledge* is what Strasser calls totalising knowledge. It has to do with a total impression, a form of knowing reality (*Ammutung*) that cannot be completely rationalized.³⁴ A few examples of this is a farmer sensing a storm coming up or finding someone at first sight to be likable or not. That is a kind of intuitive knowledge that may or may not be supported by the facts afterwards.

With respect to *action*, Aristotle points to the affective rooting of the will as moved by desire. Following him, Ricoeur remarks that feeling indicates our positive or negative appreciation of things: something attracts us or repels us. Thus in our actions we are motivated by desire. A shortage of or an urge for something makes us act.

I view *emotion*, which I have already discussed, as one layer within the whole affective experience. It is, on the one hand, connected with mood and, on the other, with knowledge and action. Emotions play a major role in our lives. We admire someone for the way he plays football, whereas a liturgical service can invoke religious emotions of joy and gratitude. Mood is indirectly influential here. It is one of the causes of emotion. A mood of dissatisfaction leads to the emotion of anger. If in the pre-intentional layer mood is an undetermined experiencing, in the intentional layer it is the soil for an intentional experiencing like emotion. Moods supply the *leitmotif* of the song, whereas feelings such as emotions are the changing melody.

Not only do moods influence emotions but the opposite is also true: emotions can determine our mood. That which we undergo settles in the form of a mood. Moods do not simply fall out of the sky but are part of the whole of lived existence that, viewed affectively, consists of different layers. Strasser uses this image:

feeling is, on the one hand, the ground which allows various living things to grow out of itself; it is, on the other hand, the fruitful earth which, unnoticed, takes into itself the decaying and withering parts of the plants — and, concurrently, all kinds of seed for further new life.³⁵

We will now look precisely at affectively charged knowledge and perception in general. We will see how affectivity (mood and emotion) internalizes our knowledge and perception.

Our perception is often impoverished because we view sense perception as unreliable. We have to know how to linger by things and open our-

selves up to the quality of things. Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur especially have provided a phenomenological analysis of this. When we involve ourselves affectively with things, persons or the world, then, according to Ricoeur, we can speak of *intentionality on its own*. On the one hand, it indicates the experienced quality of things, persons or the world. On the other hand, it testifies to the way in which the human being is touched in his affectivity. It is not only about the evaluation of something or someone through my affectivity but also about the revealing of my inner being. On the one hand, it concerns the perceived qualities of the things or persons, and, on the other, it points to the way in which I am attracted or repelled by them. It reflects *my love* or *my aversion*. The landscape has a cheerful aspect, and I am the one who is in a cheerful mood. The feeling expresses my connection with the landscape, which in its turn is a sign of my inner being. Ricoeur calls that the paradox of feeling. It is paradoxical that the same experience can reveal an aspect of the thing and at the same time express my inner being.

In the act of knowing we can externalize an object and postulate it in such a way that a subject-object split occurs. In contrast, feeling internalizes knowledge. In its influence on knowledge emotion is connected with the previous layer, pre-intentional mood. Mood expresses our belonging to being. Above, we called mood ontological feeling. Ricoeur sketches this relationship of knowing with the ontological feeling so that it does indeed receive a place with the relationship between subject and object but transcends it at the same time. The painter Cézanne states it strikingly in the following way: 'the landscape conceives itself in me and I am its consciousness.' In this way we participate through our feelings in the qualities of the world, and these feelings are a way of knowing.

Feeling internalizes the relationship of knowledge or perception of people and things, through which feeling itself in turn is deepened.³⁶ And is this not precisely the knowledge that affects the whole person, as religious knowledge does? *Religious knowledge is affective knowledge*. The layers of affective experience that we have just discussed, mood, emotion, affective knowledge, perception and action, converge in the human heart.

³⁴ Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*, 132f., 243-240.

³⁵ Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*, 185.

³⁶ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 85, 83-90. See also E.H. van Olst, 'Vormen van kennen,' 97-110.

The Heart as Intersection of Affective Knowledge

In the introduction to this chapter I referred to a fountain as a metaphor for layered affectivity. The heart is the basin of the fountain, the centre from which all the water is directed upwards and to which it returns. Thus the heart is the unity of the human being as person. Sometimes the heart is also called 'feeling.' Strasser speaks of *Gemüt*, translated variously as 'heart,' 'soul' or 'feelings.' He wants to reintroduce this term into psychology and anthropology, because it indicates very well the mutual interpenetration of the acts of the mind and of feeling.³⁷ The problem is, in my view, that the term *Gemüt* is used in ways that diverge too much from one another. I therefore prefer the term 'heart'. In Romanticism *Gemüt* received a more limited meaning as referring to 'emotional strengths' and 'feeling of values' and was not only distinguished from the heart but was also used to indicate the inner life of the human being over against rational functions such as mind, understanding and consciousness.³⁸

We saw that feeling internalizes knowledge and does so mostly in the heart. The heart can thus be called the seat of affectivity, of knowledge and action. It is the deepest core of the human being and the intersection of the layers of feeling. The general function of the heart is to unite what knowledge separates.³⁹ The heart is the place where we are connected with being, beyond the situation in which we stand as subject over against an object. Feeling personalizes reason. Because of affectivity we say that it is *my* reason. The epistemological function is in itself impersonal but through the involvement with the heart as 'feeling' it becomes personal. According to the anthropology of the Old Testament as well, the different aspects such as sensory feelings and emotions, wish and desire knowledge and insight, choice and will come together in the heart.⁴⁰

This insight into layered affectivity is important for the accounting for faith. Precisely in religion knowledge is *affective knowledge*. Religious knowledge is knowledge of the heart. It is striking that the central aspect of religion is indicated in the tradition by affectively charged terms, such as being graped unconditionally (Tillich), unconditional trust (Pannenberg, Dijnijer), love (Paul, Augustine, Pascal) or a feeling of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher).

³⁷ Strasser, *Phenomenology of Feeling*, 199, (194-201).

³⁸ H. Emmel (ed.), 'Gemüt,' *HWPB* III, 258-61.

³⁹ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 131.

⁴⁰ H.W. Wolf, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 55, 40-55.

Knowledge has an aspect of abstraction, but whoever distances himself too much from reality loses his affective connection with being, the disclosure of original reality. Augustine saw this when he remarked that knowledge is based in love. By this he means that knowledge of the heart reaches deeper than knowledge of the understanding alone. People love not because they have certain beliefs about a person but because these beliefs are stamped by love. Let us recall Pascal's statement about the knowledge of the heart: 'It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.'⁴¹ Van Olst demonstrates how layered affectivity is a determining factor in religious knowledge:

Intellectual, conceptual knowledge presupposes sense experience which, in turn, is grounded in participation through feeling. The deepest foundation in which knowledge is embedded is love as the knowledge of the heart.⁴²

Although religious knowledge is affectively charged, it is not a vague process of feeling. It is directed at the symbolic character of things. This concerns the disclosure of reality, truth in the sense of 'That is what reality truly is' with respect to one's orientation in life.

We should recall that in a practice-oriented rationality judgement is important (ch. 3.4). We have seen here that the heart is the seat of judgement with respect to having faith. It is the heart that has the function of judging, as will become clear in our discussion below of how we are to characterize assent to the testimony to Transcendence.

Affectivity, Reason and Rationality

As a consequence of the view of stratified affectivity, the position of reason must now be evaluated anew in its relationship to affectivity. Mood discloses our existence. We find ourselves having a mood in life. Intentionality for life, rather than theoretical intentionality, is primary. That has consequences for the place of reason and rationality. *The primary relationship to the world is not a relationship of theoretical knowledge but one of our affective-practical contact with it.* (Theoretical) reason does not, in the accounting for faith, precede religion in order to judge it. That was the view of many Enlightenment philosophers who allowed reason to sit as judge over religion.

⁴¹ Pascal, *Pensées*, 154 (fr. 278).

⁴² Van Olst, 'Vormen van kennen,' 106

It is now apparent, due to insights in phenomenology after Husserl, that reason does not precede everything but emerges out of our dealing with the world, and that reason and rationality are a part of our life world and come to expression primarily in our interpretive dealing with our own life world. The human person is an understanding (*verstehend*) being and that entails reason or rationality as understanding and giving meaning to things. Reason has proved to be historical and no longer functioning as God's view of the world. Knowledge is closely connected with our world as disclosed by mood and is determined by that. A practice-oriented rationality for the accounting for faith can do justice to that.

We can speak of an *osmosis, a mutual interpenetration of affectivity and (the acceptance of) our beliefs*. That moves in both directions. On the one hand, beliefs influence affectivity. The cognitive theory of emotion taught us that convictions can lead to certain affects. On the other hand, affectivity influences our (and our acceptance of) beliefs. Knowledge is grounded in the more original practical affective relationship of the human being to her world. Affects such as love and hate do not only influence knowledge, but knowledge can itself be affective. Faith knowledge is affective knowledge.

Layered affective experiences exist in general. I will now apply that insight to the Christian faith. Although Schleiermacher did not use the terminology of twentieth-century phenomenology, in his work one can find layered affective religious experience in the making.

3.2. *The Layered Religious Affective Experience (Schleiermacher)*

Due to the mood or feeling of life we experience reality in relationship to our having a mood. Mood is the totality of feeling and is often of a lasting nature. Mood can also be stamped religiously, if we experience the world on the basis of a mood of trust or of a feeling of absolute dependence.

We encounter continually in Schleiermacher the foundations of the insight into experience as layered, an insight which would be developed a century later in phenomenology. Schleiermacher calls himself a philosopher with respect to understanding and a believer with respect to feeling.⁴³ In 1802 he wrote to Reimer that he had a mystical tendency because of his Moravian background. We already saw how he placed the relation-

ship with God in the immediate, non-reflective self-consciousness. Now we will see that, for him, this is part of a layered religious experience. I will reconstruct this, by means of the impressive introduction to *The Christian Faith* from which I already drew, in order to clarify the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience (ch. 3.2).⁴⁴

The Pre-Intentional Layer: The Heart as the Place of the Religious Mood

What I have called the heart is, in Schleiermacher, the immediate self-consciousness or 'feeling.' He calls it feeling because there is nothing here yet of 'representation' as the reflective self-consciousness knows it (§3.2). In his sermons Schleiermacher often uses the term *Gemüt* (feeling). This immediate self-consciousness precedes knowledge and action. It is pre-reflective and points to the unity of the person. Feeling thus means something entirely different from James' use of the term, in which feeling is emotion. In Schleiermacher it indicates the identity of the human being, the heart in which everything comes together and which gives direction to everything.

As 'feeling,' the heart has different nuances in that it is not only the unity of the consciousness but is also the seat of our basic feelings or moods. It is the place where our feeling is most internalized into a basic feeling or mood. How much mood should be distinguished from emotion is apparent, according to Schleiermacher, in that moods can be independent of the everyday stream of events, from our acts of thought and will. He uses the examples of joy and sorrow (§3.2). They are emotions if they are connected directly with a concrete situation, but they can also be a mood and thus become the basic tone of our lives. Moods are the *leitmotif* of the song, whereas emotions give life its melody.

The involvement of the person with religious Transcendence — which Schleiermacher calls piety — is situated in the heart as the *feeling* of absolute dependence next to other basic feelings such as *relative* freedom and *relative* dependence which come into play in our actual relationships with people (§§3-4).

With respect to religion the issue is the human heart with the basic mood of the feeling of absolute dependence. For Schleiermacher, this is not just a basic mood, but it determines the identity of the person. The feeling of absolute dependence is our ultimate concern.

⁴³ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, Letter to Jacobi, 30 March 1818, in: *Schleiermacher-Auswahl*, 117.

⁴⁴ The references in the text are to sections from this work.

Schleiermacher first describes this feeling of absolute dependence separately, pulled out of the contexts in which it functions in the everyday life of the human being (§§3-4) so as to place it again within the everyday practice of faith (§§5-6). This brings us to the intentional layer.

The Intentional Layer

We become conscious of ourselves not in isolation from all relationships but in relationship with the world around us. In the everyday practice of life the feeling of absolute dependence functions in interaction with what I called the intentional layer. The *pre-reflective consciousness* is thus connected with the *sensory consciousness* (§5).

To give more shape to these different layers of the consciousness Schleiermacher defines them in contrast to what he calls the *animal consciousness*, referring to the earlier, darker period of human development. This 'animal consciousness' is diffuse and primitive in that perception (*Anschauung*) and feeling were not yet distinguished. He sees an indication that this was so in the consciousness of the child before it begins to speak and our dreams also point to this animal consciousness. Schleiermacher wrote this before Freud's discovery of the subconscious.

Through the sensory consciousness we are involved with others and with nature. Here the moral and the social feelings and emotions come into play (§5.1). Schleiermacher now shows that the feeling of absolute dependence develops in interaction with the sense consciousness. That happens through what I called the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience.

Trans-Intentional Religious Experience

Schleiermacher distinguishes three steps in human consciousness, the animal: the sensory and the highest step of human self-consciousness — the feeling of absolute dependence. He first described the feeling of absolute dependence in itself in the immediate self-consciousness. Now he describes it in connection with our relationships in the world. Thus the feeling of absolute dependence gives orientation to and stamps our sensory, intentional consciousness. That is the concern of the feeling of absolute dependence and it is connected with our lives which are lived in the life world and in a more objective way in the professional world.

Here it concerns what I called the trans-intentional aspect of religious experience. This trans-intentional aspect appears to be affectively coloured by our basic feeling of absolute dependence. For example, gratefulness for the birth of a child can deepen into the permanent mood of gratefulness toward God. The intentional relationship is thus transcended in a trans-intentional way. That is how I understand Schleiermacher when he states that the relationship of a subject with an object (which he calls an opposition) is transcended in the relationship with God, the feeling of absolute dependence (§5.1). Thus in Schleiermacher we find a layered religious experience in embryonic form, in which intentionality (antithesis) is the criterion:

Hence there seems to be no objection to our distinguishing three grades of self-consciousness: the confused animal grade, in which the antithesis cannot arise, as the lowest; the sensible self-consciousness, which rests entirely upon the antithesis, as the middle; and the feeling of absolute dependence, in which the antithesis again disappears and the subject unites and identifies itself with everything which, in the middle grade, was set over against it, as the highest. (§2.1)

The seat of the feeling of absolute dependence, as the highest step of human self-consciousness, which is in fact in a state of constant interaction with everyday life, I have called the heart. It is in the heart, after all, that all affective layers converge and the connection between them is made.

In summary, the feeling of absolute dependence is the basic mood of life and is located in embryonic form in the heart. It develops in interaction with the sensory consciousness, the religion of everyday life. Thus one can speak of an affective, trans-intentional religious experience in which opposition, which belongs to the sensory consciousness, is transcended.

In his theory of emotion Schleiermacher emphasizes introspection and describes emotion and affectively charged knowledge differently from how I have done (§2 and §3.1). We would be going too far afield to explore Schleiermacher's view of affectivity here.⁴⁵ I introduce him here only as an example of the *layered view of religious affectivity*. Schleiermacher also demonstrates in his own way how affectivity and knowledge are closely connected in religious experience and how *faith knowledge itself is affective as knowledge of the heart*. He states that

⁴⁵ See, for example, W. Stöcker, 'Religion als Ausdruck des gestimmten Gefühls' 79-104.

'Christian doctrines are accounts of the Christian religious affections set forth in speech' (§15). This statement is sometimes incorrectly viewed as saying that feeling or the heart should be the source of faith. However, feeling (*Gemüt*) is the organ and not the source of faith. The Christian proclamation is, for Schleiermacher, the witness to Christ and to the Spirit.

One can similarly point to other basic religious feelings, as Schleiermacher did, such as hope, desire and absolute trust.⁴⁶ Hope is the atmosphere in which the believer breathes. There are moments in which a glimpse is seen of the hoped-for end of freedom and justice, of the coming of the Kingdom of God. E. Bloch, in his philosophical analysis of hope, makes clear that hope acts like a flash of light in what he calls a 'pre-appearance [*Vorerscheinung*] of the kingdom of freedom.'⁴⁷ Yearning is something other than need that arises from a shortage. We still our hunger and our need for food is thus satisfied. Need has to do with our urge for self-preservation. Yearning is something else and concerns a kind of unrest that Augustine described as a yearning for God. This yearning is not satisfied but deepened by religious Transcendence.⁴⁸ The Dutch poet Willem Barnard writes in a hymn: 'God's goodness is too great for happiness alone.'⁴⁹ Absolute trust is involved not only with something in the world but also with religious Transcendence. We experience absolute trust in and through the things of the world. It is therefore something different from our trust in people, which is already relative. The mood of trust provides rather, as the term basic feeling indicates, the basis for relationships of trust in life. The trans-intentional basic experience of trust sees relationships with people and things from the perspective of a comprehensive and all-penetrating depth-dimension of Transcendence.

In my explanation of affective religious experience I have not considered religious experience as a separate layer in distinction from the pre-intentional level of mood and the intentional level of emotion, knowledge and action. Religious experience stamps both levels as experience-with-everyday experiences. In distinction from Van Saane I do not speak of three layers but of two. Van Saane also points out that experience occurs on the pre-intentional and intentional levels. In addition, she also speaks about experience as meta-intentional experience (204f.). Pointing to such a sepa-

rate layer of experience could lead to some misunderstanding. I propose a different understanding of this issue by emphasizing that (religious) experience occurs in and through the pre-intentional and intentional layers.⁵⁰

We have thus answered the question of what we are to understand by the statement that faith knowledge is affective knowledge. It consists of (cognitively determined) emotion and of mood, converging in the human heart. These insights I will now use to answer the question of how we should characterize the assent to a testimony to religious Transcendence.

4. Affectivity and the Rationality of Assent

The Principle of Proportionality

What role does affectivity play in assenting to the testimony to religious Transcendence? In the introduction to this chapter I pointed to the principle of proportionality for assenting to something. Assent should be proportional to the type of evidence that is provided. If we do not have much evidence, then neither should the extent of our assent be very great. Assent to something that is not incontestable is therefore conditional, tentative, and dependent on the strength of the reasons that are produced for it.⁵¹ We will therefore now direct our attention to the assent to faith.

The principle of proportionality is used in many ways by different people: the doctor in diagnosing a sickness, a judge in weighing the evidence and coming to an assessment of guilty or not guilty, an academic indicating how correct a certain interpretation of a historical source is. Only the evidence counts and our emotions have no place in the assessment.

If this principle is applied to a religious belief, we have a problem. Now that it is apparent that believers do not have any hard evidence for God's existence from natural theology, they can, according to this principle, believe only tentatively. Faith is, however, a matter of ultimate concern and therefore unconditional. That conflicts with the principle of proportionality.

This principle does not hold true in every situation. For many things in life we have little evidence and yet we see them as certain. *The extent of our assent often goes beyond the kind of reasons we have for them.* If

⁴⁶ For religious transcending experiences see T. de Boer, *De God van de filosofen en de God van Pascal* [The God of the Philosophers and the God of Pascal], 109-13.

⁴⁷ E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip der Hoffnung*, I, 334-67 (342, 364).

⁴⁸ E. Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, 3-5.

⁴⁹ *Liedboek voor de kerken* [Hymnal for the Churches], No. 223.

⁵⁰ See J. W. van Saane, *De rol van gevoelens*, ch. 5.

⁵¹ See note 2.

we ask someone for practical information on how to get to a nearby village, we accept the answer that is given not tentatively but completely. We are also quick to correct wrong information. This is somewhat different with respect to political, worldview or religious beliefs. Because it ferret with respect to political, worldview or religious beliefs. Because it concerns our ultimate concern here, the commitment is often complete and total. Even in science we do not always assent tentatively to views and our assent goes beyond the reasons we have for them. When new theories are developed an attitude of commitment is required that goes beyond the grounds for those theories. New theories can be easily falsified in their early stages. In the beginning there is a discrepancy between the theory and its grounds. Only when there is further development can the new theory appear to be better than the old. If the principle of proportionality is applied here, then it would be much more difficult for new theories to become accepted. Sometimes one simply has to believe in something before its support can be fully worked out. Therefore an affective commitment to the new theory that goes beyond the limits of the evidence is also important in science.⁵² Is this not true for a great deal of scientific research in the early stages? There is, after all, only a sense of a direction that, tentatively and gradually, research proves to be true or false. Without faith that goes beyond the evidence, research would never get off the ground.

In everyday life, in worldviews and religions and sometimes in science, the extent of assent to a belief goes beyond the reasons that one can produce for it. The principle of credibility that I used does not affect this issue. According to this principle, it is rational to have beliefs unless there are good reasons against it. That does not say anything about the extent of assent to a belief. In practice it does not happen very often that people are tentative religious believers. The acceptance of faith is usually complete and total. How can we determine whether that is rational or irrational?

Because the principle of proportionality does not apply in practice all the time, it is better to make a different distinction from that of accepting something *tentatively* or *completely*. We can distinguish, that is, between *complete* (unconditional) and *dogmatic* assent to something. Accepting a testimony or a statement dogmatically entails that the objections brought against it are not examined. Assent to something does not have to be irrational if it goes beyond the reasons one has for it. But it is

irrational if people adhere dogmatically to beliefs that they know to be incorrect. That conflicts with the principle of presumption.

If the principle of proportionality is seen to be universally valid, then the element of *passion* in beliefs and in choices for a certain belief is denied. It is precisely the layered view of affectivity that clarifies the given that the extent of our assent goes beyond the reasons for it in certain situations. I will now focus the insights gained in both of the previous sections on the affectivity of the assent to faith.

The Element of Passion in the Assent to Faith

If the role of affectivity for the accounting for faith is acknowledged, it can still be viewed in different ways. Are affectivity and reason two isolated entities, as William James and Jonathan Edwards claim, or do they display a close coherence and mutual influence?

We saw how James ascribed to affectivity the status of being its own source of knowledge and distinguished this sharply from theological doctrine. Affectivity and reason are two independent entities. Edwards, as well, the well-known revivalist preacher from the eighteenth century, sees affectivity and reason as two independent entities, although in a different way than James does.

With respect to Mark's example of the reaction of the women at the grave to the testimony of the young man dressed in white, Edwards would argue that their affectivity needs to be purified. He speaks of a sense of the heart that perceives God's beauty and enjoys it. Therefore, he argues for a *purification of the affects and of reason*. According to him, there is a new principle given to us by God that purifies our reason:

[I]t sanctifies the reasoning faculty and assists it to see the clear evidence there is of the truth of religion in rational arguments, and in two ways, viz. as it removes prejudices and so lays the mind more open to the force of arguments, and also secondly, as it positively enlightens and assists it to see the force of rational arguments ... by adding greater light, clearness and strength to the judgment.⁵³

Edwards speaks of a new principle that removes prejudices and make the mind receptive to the power of rational arguments.

⁵² T. S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension*, 236.

⁵³ Miscellanies (*The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from His Private Notebooks*, H. G. Townsend (ed.), 1955), cited by W. J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 43.

With respect to the issue with which I am concerned, Edwards holds that affectivity and reason are two *independent entities*. According to him, reason does not have an affective dimension.⁵⁴ Edwards does, of course, acknowledge that the whole person must be purified. The view of affectivity as layered clarifies that better than the view of affectivity and reason as two independent entities. The latter does not do full justice to the unity of the human beings, because it speaks of the purification of the affects and of the understanding as two capacities independent of each other. In the view of affective experience as layered, affectivity plays a *more structural role*. There is a close connection between affectivity and reason or knowledge. Feeling turns reason into *my* reason and internalizes religious knowledge. In this sense it is affective knowledge.

A layered view of affectivity clarifies why in some situations the extent of our assent to something goes beyond the kind of evidence we have for it. It shows that the narrative influence on the reader intended by Mark's gospel also involves the *layered affective experience* of the reader. Mark asks the readers of his story what their position is, for example, with respect to values like love and discipleship that in certain situations demands sacrifice.

In what respect does affectivity play a role in the assent to a testimony or argument? With regard to this it is important to distinguish between the *logical validity of something* and its *power of persuasion*.

The distinction between the logical validity of an argument and its power of persuasion obtains with respect to both religious and secular life. Let us take smoking as an example. 'Smoking kills,' it says on my box of cigars. In spite of this, most smokers are not convinced by such arguments, because their passion for smoking is too great. Newman's distinction between notional and real assent clarifies this. The smoker will intellectually assent to the logical validity of the argument (notional assent), but that is different from being persuaded by the argument (real assent). Only if the smoker lets go of his passion for smoking can he assent in a real way to the argument against smoking. Given the strong arguments against smoking, the smoker is to be viewed as irrational. We are not dealing here with a commitment that goes beyond the evidence for it, but the choice to smoke is in conflict with strong reasons against it, at least if one sees the choice for life as a positive value.

This distinction between the logical validity of an argument and its power of persuasion is important for the question that is our concern in

this section: the assent to the testimony to religious Transcendence. Newman points out that not only affectivity but the imagination, which is closely connected with it, influences the power of persuasion. A Catholic liturgy often speaks to people more than the sober, traditional Protestant liturgy, as is apparent from, for example, the choice of some writers for the Catholic church. A narrative nourishes our imagination and thus has more persuasive power than inductive or deductive reasoning. After all, stories, like the Markan narrative, provide a new way of looking at reality. They provide an iconographic increase through which an appeal is made to the imagination of the reader. In connection with this, Newman points to the difference from natural science:

This is why science has so little of a religious tendency: deductions have no power of persuasion. The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.⁵⁵

Unlike Newman, I stated that in (natural) science as well commitment can play a certain role, but this does not detract from what he says about religion. Affectivity and imagination intensify, according to Newman, the power of having a certain belief and assessing the reasons for it.

The recognition that affectivity and imagination influence religious beliefs and assent to testimonies can be viewed either positively or negatively. People can assess something on the basis of affective knowledge that is hostile to the testimony in question, as Mark shows in Jesus' own disciples. It is then a question of acquiring the right disposition so as to come to the right insight concerning faith. The *what* of the faith content determines the *who* of the receiver of the story and thus also the *affective how* of his assent. The most important emotion or mood is love, as Paul and Augustine emphasize. The acquirement of this affective disposition determines the *warning* or *not warning* to see the reason for believing or of the argumentative power of Mark's narrative explanation that Jesus is the Son of God. But does believing then not become something irrational?

What is the consequence of the affectively determined power of persuasion for the rationality of our assent? The rational belief appears to be person-relative. It does not exist on its own but always in connection with the affectivity of the witness and, more broadly, with the experiences that

⁵⁴ Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 28.

⁵⁵ J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 65f.

he has had. We continually need to ask *whose* rational beliefs they are. In addition, we must also distinguish the logical validity of an argument from its power of persuasion. Affectivity concerns the persuasive power and not the logical validity. Affectivity and imagination do not make an argument logically weaker or stronger. It is *not* the *correctness* or the *truth* of a conviction that is *person-relative* but *someone's rational belief* as such. The extent to which it is reasonable to have a certain belief varies from person to person.

Does the strong emphasis that I am placing upon affectivity not adversely affect the rationality of the assent? James holds that we cannot decide important matters on which our life depends and for which we do not have sufficient evidence on the basis of reason. In such matters the decision lies with the affectivity ('the passionate nature'). There is a will to believe.⁵⁶ Does that also obtain for the Christian faith?

Religious faith is, in my view, not only a matter of the will. If that is what is claimed, then faith knowledge is left defenceless. Religions claim to be able to make statements about what reality truly is and thus make knowledge claims. Thus the Christian faith states that reality cannot be viewed nihilistically but as the creation of God. Believers claim that they experience salvation in Christ and therefore make a claim about God's acts in history. Such assertions are, in James' view, however, difficult to discuss. From his point of view that is understandable, because he acknowledges only a kind of non-conceptual knowledge on the basis of feeling (§2). If faith knowledge is viewed, as I view it, as affective knowledge, then we must clarify the nature of the relationship between the rational and the affective aspects of the assent to a testimony to religious Transcendence. It will also help to clarify how we are to characterize such an assent to a testimony.

An Affective, Absolute-Relative Affirmation

In a practice-oriented rationality the human being as a person is important because rationality is a matter of the *judgement* of the person involved. Accepting a religious testimony entails, as we saw an *absolute* and a *relative* aspect (ch. 3.3). It is *absolute* in two respects: the testimony is absolute according to its content and the acceptance of it is unconditional, because it has to do with the ultimate concern. As far the absolute-

ness of the testimony is concerned, we have seen that religious experience, as a trans-intentional experience, is to be described as a saturated phenomenon (ch. 3.2 and 3.5). The absolute acceptance was discussed above when we stated that assent to something can go beyond our reasons for it. For the *rational aspect of assent* it is important to emphasize that the acceptance is absolute in the sense of being unconditional, which is something different from accepting a conviction dogmatically. Reasons against a belief should also be assessed with respect to their validity. That is what the relative aspect refers to in assenting to a testimony.

The acceptance of a religious testimony is *relative* in two respects: the witness himself should judge whether the testimony is talking about the true God. In Mark's narrative Jesus himself is the primary witness. His relationship with God is not disputable for him. After the temptation in the wilderness he is encouraged at his baptism in the Jordan by the voice from heaven as well as just before his suffering in his transfiguration, with the same words 'You are (This is) my Son, whom I love.'

The later reader needs to assess Mark's story about Jesus with respect to its reliability as well. In whose name did he act? The question is already posed by the teachers of the law when they accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Mark 3:23). The question of the historical reliability of the gospel of Mark and more broadly of Scripture is also important here.

It is a perennial question in every faith as to whether they worship God or an idol. Explanations for religious experience other than that of religious Transcendence should be discussed — such as those of Marx, Frazer, Durkheim and Freud. Only if these possible refutations have been satisfactorily answered is the witness rationally responsible in accepting a testimony, according to the principle of presumption, that it is rational to accept something as credible unless there are reasons brought against it.

Accepting a religious testimony is a complex affair because of these absolute and relative factors. It is apparent that faith concerns something other than accepting an empirically verifiable fact, without this entailing that faith becomes irrational and intangible. With respect to this, Kant made a proposal by terming that which properly belongs to faith rational faith (*Vernunftglaube*), as something that lies outside the distinction between knowledge and opinion. He thus shows the difference between worldviews and science. For him it is a matter of the area of the 'ideas' in distinction from that of science and of empirical and historical reality. He thus confirms that religious faith is concerned with beliefs that are not

⁵⁶ W. James, 'The Will to Believe,' 1-31.

geometrical in nature. Kant has in mind, without mentioning its affective character as such, what Pascal called *sentiment*, Schleiermacher *feeling* and I in the preceding section called the *heart*. His view of faith as rational faith denies, however, the historical aspect of the faith. Rational faith is, in Kant, related to matters that lie outside historical reality, whereas the Christian faith with its salvific facts of cross and resurrection is anchored in history. Therefore the term rational faith is, in my view, not very suited to characterizing a religious faith. In one way or another one must account for the historical aspect of the faith. Kant makes too sharp a distinction between science and faith.

The atheist Philippe holds that the believer has two choices, both of which are irrational.⁵⁷ The one choice is to keep what is actually religious outside the area of the facts, as Kant does. According to Philippe the religious-transcendent is turned into something unknowable, thus making the faith immune to criticism. This choice is, as I have stated, not possible for the Christian faith. The other choice, according to Philippe, is to have the religious-transcendent refer to something actual. And the Christian faith does that with its statements about a God who acts in history and about Jesus' cross and resurrection. Philippe argues that the area of the facts belongs to science and that science can explain religious phenomena conclusively without referring to the religious-transcendent. I have disputed this view, which is also to be found in Proudfoot (ch. 2.4). Why can religious and scientific explanations for religious phenomena not be viewed as complementary? Alston interpreted a direct perception of God theistically and his analysis is to be taken seriously. I have not replaced it with Proudfoot's explanation but have given a phenomenological description of religious experience (ch. 3.5.2). In the following chapter I will give a theistic explanation for why people experience salvation in Christ (ch. 6.3). The reader may judge whether my argument from religious experience is reasonable.

In the question of whether faith is rational I use the principle of presumption. It is rational to accept something as credible without first being able to give reasons for it, unless reasons against it are produced. Such a reason against believing would be, for example, the possible historical unreliability of Mark or, more broadly, of Scripture. We can no longer, as Tillich did, sail around the problem of historical criticism by digging a presuppose statements such as the historical anchoring here of the Christian faith. In the final chapter I will evaluate this change of the historical unreliability of Mark. Here my concern is to characterize the assent to a testimony of religious Transcendence.

⁵⁷ H. Philippe, *Atheistisch Manifest*, ch. 2.

Assenting to a testimony as a fundamental truth is, in the end, affective. It is, namely, an *act of trust*. Trust is a basic mood of faith. The certainty of faith is a matter of affective affirmation, of believing-in. The truth of faith is primarily an existential truth, but it presupposes an anchoring in history. That is why we can classify faith better as an affirmation than as a rational faith (*Vernunftglaube*). The affirmation concerns the truth of faith that Jesus is the Christ (truth as the meaning of what is related) and presupposes Jesus' historical life (truth as 'history', as actually having happened). A false testimony, false in both senses as untrue and as not genuine is always possible.

The certainty of and trust in the Christian faith cannot be made hard in a scientific, deductive or inductive way. But neither is it based on arbitrary opinion. Testimonies have the status of a believing-in, a believing that stands between empirical assertion and pure opinion.⁵⁸ Ultimately, it concerns a grounded trust in the promise of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In short, accepting a testimony to Transcendence can be classified as an *affective, absolute-relative affirmation, a believing-in*. This characterization of the assent to faith also indicates its *rational* character, because the witness to faith is not immune to criticism in his acceptance. The witness should, after all, be able to give an answer to possible objections. Does the testimony talk about the true God or about an illusion? He should also be able to answer the question of whether the testimony of the Scripture is historically reliable. If that is answered satisfactorily then, according to the principle of credulity, assent to a testimony of religious Transcendence can be rationally responsible. The affirmation of the believer thus lies *between the rational and the not-rational*.

It is not enough to limit the accounting for faith to the acknowledgment that there are possible refutations of the faith. The accounting for faith can also be seen from another point of view and we can ask if there are also *positive reasons* for believing.

The principle of presumption rejects the requirement of evidentialism that reasons need to be given before one can accept a belief but does not deny the possibility of giving positive reasons for faith. To the contrary: presumptionism is not a form of fideism, because it recognizes that there can be reasons against a belief but also that positive reasons can be given for one's own belief.⁵⁹ Making a rationally responsible

⁵⁸ See also Ricoeur, *Le Juste* 2, 77f.

⁵⁹ Stenmark, *Rationality*, 214.

judgement consists not only in being able to refute objections but also in giving good reasons, if the situation requires. As far as the accounting for faith is concerned, these are not neutral reasons, because the person who gives them is herself stamped by the Bible story, as we saw in the previous chapter. The rational belief is thus *person-relative*. In this chapter we saw what the assent to a testimony to religious Transcendence precisely entails. The *what* of the faith content determines not only the *who* of the receiver but also the *how* of his assent. The affirmation is affective in nature, which also influences its power of persuasion. That does not adversely affect the logical validity of the testimony and the reasons that can be adduced for that.

In the next chapter I will give a positive reason for the claim that 'people experience salvation from God in Christ.' I will bring together the three elements of religious experience that I discussed and, as a positive reason, formulate an argument from religious experience. The building blocks for this have been presented in this and the previous chapters. The trans-intentional aspect of religious experience can be rationally described in a philosophical way as a saturated phenomenon (ch. 3). Biblical stories such as the Markan narrative give in their narrative form a narrative explanation of the belief that Jesus is the living Son of God (ch. 4). Assent to a testimony to religious Transcendence such as that of Mark, is an affective, absolute-relative assent that is not arational but lies between the rational and the not-rational.

6. WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE?

If in both theology and the sciences our rational inquiry always is profoundly shaped by a response to interpreted experience, and if our own experiences are indeed rationally compelling because rationality by nature is *person-relative*, then it becomes clear that precisely our experiences — in the broadest sense of the word — in some important sense must be the source of what we normally regard as good reasons, or convincing evidence, for shaping and determining our choices and responsible judgments. Van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality*, 221

1. Introduction

Is it rational to believe, to have faith? If believers claim that they have experienced God's salvation in Jesus Christ, can they account for such a claim in a rational way? Or do we respond by saying that such a faith experience is very personal and thus 'beyond' rationality? Let us see how the different ways of accounting for faith account for religious experience.

Classical apologetics required, for determining whether the claim to have experienced salvation in Christ was justified, a rational investigation to decide whether Scripture indeed contained a revelation from God. In Scripture, after all, lies the origin of such experiences. Due to the miracles (and prophecies) recorded in Scripture, it was accepted that Scripture was a revelation from God. And natural theology held that the existence of God could be proven by means of the proofs of God's existence. If the religious experiences of contemporary believers are in continuity with those which Scripture relates, then one can accept them because it is rational to assume that they come from God. The reason to have faith is not the religious experience itself but the evidence supplied by miracles, supported by the proof of God's existence. The reason for the Christian faith is not self-evident but open to possible refutation. For Locke, the proof supplied by miracles yielded only a degree of probability rather than certainty.

A *transcendental accounting for faith*, such as Tillich's, calls such an experience of God's salvation in Christ an experience of being grasped by the New Being. Tillich wanted to show the transcendental element in such an experience, the element through which the human being is imme-

diately connected with God. Because of this mystical element, mysticism as a category, he can include the Christian faith among self-authenticating beliefs. Due to this transcendental element, religious experiences are self-evident. Thus, human beings can be immediately certain about their faith. This quality of being self-evident holds even for the specific Christian faith as being grasped by the New Being. The price of his appeal to a self-authenticating experience is that faith becomes immune to criticism.

The *analytical-epistemological accounting for faith* focusses the claim to have experienced salvation on the direct perception of God. In this view experience is not self-evident and is therefore open to criticism. Such a direct perception can be immediately justified, because it has an objective aspect in that God presents himself to the believer. The direct perception of God and indirect, lasting religious experiences together constitute a positive reason, a cumulative argument for having faith. The reason to have faith is not self-evident for the person concerned but open to possible refutation.

And the *hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith*? Here also, as for Tillich and Alston, religious experience is itself the source for the reason to believe. This accounting for faith, however, does not start with a direct perception of God but views experience in the claim that people experience God's salvation in Jesus Christ primarily as a lasting experience, experience as a process. It holds that the claim to have experienced God's salvation in Jesus Christ can best be explained on the basis of the Christian faith and not via a non-religious explanation. The building blocks for this were presented in the previous chapters with reference to the rationality of religious experience:

1. Phenomenology describes the trans-intentional aspect of experience as a saturated phenomenon (ch. 3.5.2).
2. Biblical narratives, such as that of Mark, give narrative explanations of the belief that Jesus is the living Son of God (ch. 4).
3. The assent to faith is to be characterized as an affective, absolute-relative affirmation, a believing-in. For assent to the Christian faith the principle of presumption obtains. The assent to faith is affective, but that does not adversely affect its rationality. The witness should, after all, in line with the principle of presumption, consider the objections and should, among other things, investigate whether the testimony to which he has assented is about God or about an idol. In this chapter I want to use these building blocks for an argument from religious experience and thus give a positive reason for faith.

Before I develop this argument, I will first take up the possible objection that my proposed accounting for faith is nothing else than *fideism*. If that is so, then I would have shown that faith has its own rationality but also that it would be difficult to account for it to those who hold different beliefs. I would be unable to give any reason for my commitment to that faith. The results of the previous chapters would have led to this position. A practice-oriented rationality would be used and it would be claimed that there are *no objective reasons* in the strong sense of classical foundationalism for faith. If I claim that the witness is refigured by the story, does that not entail that the content of the faith can be understood only within one's own context? I have also argued that assent to faith is affective, with the result that *a rational belief is person-relative*. We need to ask: *Whose* rational belief we are talking about? Faith knowledge is, after all, knowledge of the heart.

On the basis of these results the objection can be made that the accounting for faith that I propose must entail fideism. The alternative to the objectivism of foundationalism would thus be the *relativism of contextualism*: meanings are determined by a specific context and that holds *a fortiori* for religion. According to contextualism, one cannot account for a practice like faith to those who do not hold to that faith, because the practice itself cannot be justified. We simply participate in it. Rationality and truth are practice-relative. Therefore, we cannot give any reasons for our commitment (ch. 2.4). If we do speak about reasons, then it is only in the sense of a clarification of faith through showing its internal rationality. My accounting for faith would scarcely differ from the contextualistic accounting for faith that R.F. Thiemann presented in his *Revelation and Theology*. Thiemann uses a narrative theology as well. Therefore, I will first take up this objection and show the difference between my position and that of contextualism. Do the building blocks gleaned from the previous chapters lead to fideism?

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the accounting for faith proposed by the contextualist Thiemann in order to examine the claim of contextualism that we cannot provide any reasons for our commitment (§2). After commenting and critiquing this view, I will give a positive reason for having faith, an argument based on experience (§3). Finally, I will look at the question of how the hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith functions in a world of secular and religious world-views (§4).

2. Contextualism and the Accounting for Faith

2.1. R.F. Thiemann's Theological Contextualism

Contextualism holds, as we saw in chapter 2, that a form of life or practice is autonomous and that rationality and truth are practice-relative. Thiemann's position comes close to this, as is apparent from his accounting for faith in his *Revelation and Theology*.¹ His starting point is the gospel narrative. By means of the gospel of Matthew he wants to demonstrate God's preventence, by which he means that God is prior to our theological framework (72, 76, 92). People do not invent God; rather, God comes from God. Tillich tried to show the priority of God in the transcendental aspect of religious experience and Alston in the objective moment of the direct perception of God.

The criticism of the anti-foundationalist Thiemann of the way in which theology points to God's priority obtains, in my view, also for Tillich and Alston. Both give an epistemological explanation for the origin of the Christian faith. For Tillich, that was the mystical a priori as the foundation of faith which is its own ground and for Alston the direct perception of God. In their discussions God is thus seen as the causal agent of both the mystical a priori and of the direct perception of God. Thiemann argues correctly that the *doctrine of revelation becomes epistemology*, because revelation no longer refers primarily to the content of particular experiences and beliefs but to their origin. No doubt, Tillich and Alston acknowledge that revelation refers to the content of particular experiences, but — and that is Thiemann's objection — their accounting for faith places the emphasis primarily on God as the cause and not on the content of the revelation. For his own accounting for faith, Thiemann himself gives a description of the content of the Christian faith by means of an exegesis of Matthew's gospel, as I did using Mark's gospel.

In his anti-foundationalist accounting for faith Thiemann wants to indicate God's preventence in the internal logic of the Christian faith. He does this in a 'holist justification' in which he searches for the relationship between the disputed belief in question (God's preventence) and the web of interrelated beliefs (75). To do this he gives a literary-theological analysis of Matthew's gospel. In doing so, he wants to describe God's

identity in a narrative way as the one who is faithful to his covenantal promise. Thiemann wants to argue that

Belief in God's preventence is implied in faith's conviction that God's promises as depicted in narrative form are true. I will thus defend a modest doctrine of revelation, by which I simply mean an explication of the Christian conviction that the God identified in scriptural narrative truly issues his word of promise to the readers of the text. The doctrine of revelation I seek to defend is not a foundational epistemological theory but an account which traces the internal logic of a set of Christian convictions concerning God's identity and reality. (70; italics mine)

To answer the question of who God is we need to keep our eye on Matthew's theological purpose. For the evangelist this is the identification of Jesus of Nazareth as 'Immanuel, the Son of God, who enacts God's intention to save his people from sin through death and resurrection' (114). Here Thiemann looks primarily at the description of Jesus' pattern of behaviour in order to determine his identity in relationship to God on that basis.

In the Gospel of Matthew there are, according to Thiemann, three patterns of identification through which via the narrative the identity of this human being as the Son of God gradually becomes clearer. Matthew emphasizes first Jesus' unique salvific mission. Here his personal identity remains in the background and his formal identity as heir and fulfiller of Israel's promises remains central (chs 1-4).

Next, in the middle part Matthew specifies Jesus' personal identity based on the narrated story (Matthew 4:18-20:34). Gradually, the reader identifies the distant figure of the first four chapters, the 'stylized Son of God,' with the concrete person, Jesus of Nazareth (123). For some that is blasphemy. This identification can be denied: it concerns, after all, something that is not obvious but, according to the story of the gospel, nonetheless true. This person is the Son of God. Assent to this requires an act of faith and of discipleship (124). Jesus has here therefore a personal identity and he is identified as the suffering Son of God (125).

In the third section of the gospel (chs 21-28) he is, as the suffering one, most clearly identified as the unique Son of God who obediently enacts the will of his Father. The unity between the intentions of God and those of Jesus are visible in the events of the cross and resurrection. Jesus' true character is most sharply revealed when he no longer has the power on the cross to act for himself. God's power is made manifest in this powerlessness when God acts by raising the crucified Jesus from the dead (130). It ends with Jesus' declaration: 'All power in heaven and on earth is given to me.' He who was identified at his birth as God with us, as Immanuel, and who gave his identity form through his humble identification with sinners, affirms triumphantly at the end, as the victorious one, that He is 'the very presence of God' in the final words of the gospel 'And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age' (130).

¹ The references in the text are to this work.

Thus, in this gospel God is identified in a narrative way as the Father of Jesus, which is seen primarily in Jesus' praying to the Father (11:25-30 and 26:36-46) (132). God acts directly only twice: at Jesus' baptism with the words, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased' (3:17) and also at the transfiguration with similar words (17:5). Although the word promise is not used by Matthew, this is an important aspect. The gospel is a narrated promise: 'Jesus enacts the will of the Father by fulfilling prophecy'. At the beginning of the gospel a connection is made between Jesus and Israel's inheritance in that he is identified as the Son of Abraham and David, the two figures who represent the promise of the covenant. Thus God as Yahweh is the God of the Gospel and promise, the Father of Jesus Christ, who, through raising Jesus from the dead, accomplished his plan to save his sinful people.

Thiemann's conclusion from his analysis of Matthew's gospel is that such a God can be nothing else but preventent (137):

Within the Gospel of Matthew, narrative and promise work together to specify God's identity as Yahweh, God of Israel and father of Jesus, who accomplishes his intention to save (and thus fulfills his promise) by raising Jesus from the dead. God's identity is thus inextricably linked to the actions of Jesus which are God's enacted intentions on behalf of sinners. God is identified as God of promise only as he relates to sinners through Jesus, but his *identity-in-relation designates him as the one who cannot not be preventent.* (149f.; italics mine)

Thiemann looks at the narrative in a literary way but not anthropologically, as I did in chapter 4 with respect to the gospel of Mark. He would reject seeing human existence as a narrative in the making that must be configured by the Bible story as 'mediating theology.' Thiemann sees *narrative theology* as a *descriptive theology* that rewrites the narrative patterns in the Bible stories. My question is: How does Thiemann present his narrative theology as an accounting for faith?

This accounting consists in rewriting Matthew's narrative in such a way that God's preventence and his faithfulness to the promise of the Old Testament are clear to the reader. Thiemann points in this connection to the *internal rationality* of the Christian faith. In his view, Matthew's narrative meets the internal criteria of the Christian faith (92). Thiemann gives a concrete example here of a practice-relative rationality.

The first criterion he calls the *criterion of intelligibility*, which poses the question of whether belief in God's preventence meets the conditions of intelligible communication (92). Thiemann means here the requirement of semantic rationality, i.e. the requirement that the language used be clear and consistent. Thus, using philosophical linguistic analysis, he explains basic concepts in the gospel, such as 'narrative as promise.' After

all, we do explain the Biblical story as promise (144f.). We still pray: 'Your Kingdom come.'

The second is the *criterion of the apiness of the Christian faith* (92), which poses the question of whether the faith is grounded in a coherent construal of Scripture, of both the Old and New Testaments. Here one should remember that Matthew emphasizes that the Gospel is a fulfillment of the promise of the Old Testament.

The third criterion is that of *warranted assertability* (92). With this criterion we are to judge whether Thiemann's exegesis of the gospel as narrated promise warrants Christians in their belief in God's preventence. With this conceptual rewriting of the gospel he wants to display the warrants of the Christian confession that God's promises are reliable (93). These warrants have little or nothing to do with the innate capacity of feeling, reason or language (93). The term 'warranted assertability' thus means something else than in Plantinga, who in connection with this points to our cognitive faculty and the *sensus divinitatis*, and differs also from the way in which Tillich deals with the question. It also parts from the basic approach of Alston's direct perception of God. The warrants that Thiemann encounters in the Matthean narrative refer to the narrated story of the identity of God and the content of his promises.

Without question, Thiemann shows that the Christian faith is not arbitrary or irrational by pointing out that the gospel meets these three internal criteria. If we examine the criteria more closely, however, Thiemann appears to view the Christian faith in fact as an isolated practice in contemporary society. That is not his intention, as is apparent from his first criterion, that of intelligibility. The second and third criteria show that Thiemann has difficulty meeting the requirements of a public accounting for faith — a project that he himself favours.² With respect to the last criterion, lacking in his narrative analysis is the idea that telling stories is, epistemologically, a narrative form of explanation, as we saw in the fourth chapter. He does not take very much account of possible critique by those of other worldviews or faiths, such as the Jewish reaction as articulated by Rabbi M. Goldberg to Thiemann's second criterion.

Goldberg poses the critical question to Thiemann of how Christians can justify identifying the redeeming God of the Gospel with the liberating God of Israel's early history.³ Thiemann overlooks — incorrectly — the covenantal promise made at Sinai, which is so important for Israel:

² R.F. Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology*, 20f.

³ M. Goldberg, 'God, Action, and Narrative: Which Narrative? Which Action: Which God?' 349.

Goldberg points out, among other things, that Thiemann follows Matthew's genealogy, which calls Jesus the son of David, son of Abraham (1:1), uncritically, and only talks about the covenant with Abraham (promise of a nation) and that of David's kingship. This means, according to Thiemann, that Jesus is the heir of God's promises to Israel (116, 135). The third major covenantal promise connected with Sinai, that of becoming a people, is however not reported. Goldberg remarks: 'Sinai is both literally and theologically the high point of Israel's story of the Exodus from Egypt ... Israel's subsequent *corporate* destiny, as well as the future fate of *individual* Davidic kings, are both worked out against the backdrop of the covenant at Sinai.'⁴

This is the fundamental difference between the Jew Goldberg and the Christian Thiemann in their understanding of the Scripture.

The internal rationality of the Christian faith is indispensable for an accounting for faith, but it cannot be limited to that. The shortcoming of such an accounting is that it requires that one step into the story without any clarification of its connection to the life world of the reader as a story in the making. Because of that, Thiemann's accounting is clarifying for the believer herself but not very much so for those of other worldviews and religions. Thus, this accounting for faith is *fideistic*. Thiemann does not give any reasons for one's commitment to the Christian faith that can also be discussed by those who do not belong to the Christian community. That is, Thiemann does not take up the question of how the rationality of the Christian faith is connected to the rationality of other practices. Nor does he take up the question of whether the Christian faith is open to possible critique. This accounting for faith does not compare the Christian faith with other worldviews because there are only internal criteria.

Here faith seems to be immune to critique. Thiemann points, for example, to Jesus' resurrection as a central given (108) but does not pose the question of the historical reliability of the story of the resurrection. He considers the Bible to be a world-consuming text that absorbs the reader (143). That is how contextualism solves the problem of the conclusion that truth is practice-relative: the context of the practice is that of the whole of reality. Readers should step out of their different worlds and are invited to step into the story (143, 150). Believing does not need any reasons, for in this view believing is groundless. Is contextualism right? Can we not give any reasons for our commitment?

⁴ Goldberg, 'God, Action, and Narrative', 356f.

2.2. Reasons for Commitment

According to contextualism, rationality and truth are practice-relative. Secular people and religious people live in different worlds. Everyone lives in his own world which cannot be compared with that of the other. Does this also entail, one can ask, that people cannot *understand* a religion or worldview that is not their own? If rationality and truth are practice-relative, does that entail that there can be no justification of one's own faith that can be discussed with those of another faith or worldview? Is faith then groundless? Can we not answer the question of *why we believe*? Is 'it just happens' all that we can say of faith?

If that is so, then it is impossible to explain adequately why a certain worldview or religion is better in some respects than others. It is impossible to decide, for example, why the insights of one worldview can be of more help with respect to someone's direction in life than another and why a particular worldview with its insights and rituals may provide an answer to the question of why peace is a worthy goal. Thiemann gives an accounting for faith that is convincing for his own circle but less accessible to those who belong to different circles, because it proposes only the requirement that it meet the criteria that are internal to the faith. The good reason that Thiemann gives for the Christian faith consists in a *clarification* of the gospel story, but he does not supply any reasons for belief itself in his *Revelation and Theology*.

The following considerations lead to the position that one cannot give any reasons for commitment:

1. It is not possible to understand another's worldview or religion, because people live in different worlds.

2. Faith is groundless.

With respect to the *first consideration* there is indeed a problem here. Concepts that different traditions use often have different meanings. That can be seen most sharply when practices from widely divergent cultures are compared. The Buddhist concept of compassion (*karma*) is not the same as the Biblical concept of love for one's neighbour.⁵ But it occurs in traditions within the same society as well. If a liberal speaks of equality, he means equality of opportunity, whereas the socialist thinks primarily of the result: equality of opportunity must be balanced against a relative equality in income. One could also point to the difference between secular people and religious people with their different worlds, even

⁵ H.M. Vroom, *No Other Gods*, 34.

though they speak the same (English) language. Concepts are context-dependent, but does that mean that someone who has other beliefs cannot understand at all what the believer says about God and about sin? That seems to be confirmed by the notion that one can understand scripture only if one has been illuminated by the Holy Spirit. In the assent to faith the refiguration of the person involved by the Biblical story plays a role.

The sceptic does not deny, according to contextualism, the belief in the Last Judgement but lives in a different world with an entirely different view of the possibility of life after death. The language of religious faith is difficult to translate into the language of those who believe differently. The different practices are incommensurable. It is therefore incorrect to say that the sceptic or atheist rejects the belief that sickness is a punishment by God or the belief about the Last Judgement.

This position, however, is not convincing. Insight into religious truth does indeed require a refiguration of the individual, but that does not mean that those of other faiths (prior to that refiguration) cannot understand anything about the faith. There is a difference between understanding something and seeing something in it and committing oneself to it. If someone wants to explore a religion or worldview other than her own, she does that with a *pre-understanding* (*Vorverständnis*). The fact that people live in different contexts or horizons, with their own concepts of reality, does not mean that they cannot understand those who live in other contexts.⁶ How else could Wittgenstein have written his remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, in which he criticizes Frazer's explanation of primitive religions? Contextualists like Thiemann and Winch emphasize that religions have their own meaning but do not draw the conclusion that someone of a different worldview cannot understand it.⁷

With respect to the Christian faith, Thiemann does, after all, make use of the criterion of intelligibility. If someone gives up his religion or worldview, does that mean that he thereby also no longer understands it? He will, in my view, continue to understand it, but — and this is something else — he no longer sees anything in it. His commitment to it, his affective affirmation, has disappeared.

Someone who adheres to a different worldview or religion can, to a certain extent, certainly understand something of someone else's religion or worldview: religions and worldviews are concerned with our fundamen-

tial direction in life. And that is part of our human nature (cf. 3.5.1). Religions and worldviews give answers to fundamental human questions regarding injustice, evil, salvation and the future. We can never, of course, understand another religion or worldview completely but only to a certain extent.⁸ Those who adhere to other worldviews will be able to have some understanding of a particular faith and for believers themselves understanding will vary from case to case, depending how much the individual in question is involved with his or her faith.

In short, those of other faiths or worldviews can understand another's religion or worldview to a certain extent. We should distinguish between understanding the meaning of a certain statement or belief and seeing something in it and/or committing oneself to it.

As far as the *second* consideration is concerned, is faith groundless and can we therefore not give any reasons for, for example, our faith in God? Such a judgement is an 'absolute judgement of value'.⁹ Is it actually so that justification ceases when it comes to basic beliefs, as N. Malcolm argues? He writes:

Within a language-game there is justification and lack of justification, evidence and proof, mistakes and groundless opinions, good and bad reasoning, correct measurements and incorrect ones. One cannot properly apply these terms to a language-game itself. It may, however, be said to be 'groundless', not in the sense of a groundless opinion but the sense that we accept it, we live. We can say, 'This is what we do. This is how we are.' In this sense religion is groundless; and so is chemistry.¹⁰

Malcolm draws a parallel with our use of memory: we are justified in trusting our memory until our memory has been proven to be untrustworthy.¹¹ It is simply part of our life and groundless. The same obtains, in his view, for belief in God. Such basic beliefs cannot be justified by something outside the religious practice any more than our trust in our memory can. We cannot ask if religious belief or trust in memory is rational, because these form part of our lives as such.

It is difficult, in my view, to compare trust in one's memory with having faith in God. We can deny the first only if we deny the use of our reason. The latter is, after all, not possible without our memory. The justification of the reliability of our memory implies the use of our memory, in which its reliability is taken for granted. We are dealing here with a

⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 405.

⁷ P. Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society,' 78-111.

⁸ See also H.M. Vroom, *Een water van visies*, ch. 3.

⁹ Phillips, 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games,' 123f., 130f.

¹⁰ N. Malcolm, 'The Groundlessness of Belief,' 152.

¹¹ Malcolm, 'Groundlessness,' 154f.

kind of circular argument to which Alston points in connection with the (im)possible evidence for sense perception (ch. 2.2.1). That which one wants to prove is already presupposed in the premises of the evidence. That our trust in our memory cannot be proved is not a problem because memory, like sense perception, is part of our lives. We do not need to give any reasons for it, for we simply take part in the practice of perceiving or remembering. Does that also obtain for faith in God?

The comparison of memory with faith in God is flawed, because in our Western society we can deny faith in God without ceasing to function as human beings. That is different for the oral cultures of Africa. There religion is so bound up with society as a whole that denying the religion is at the same time denying one's own existence. In that respect it is better, as far as our own situation is concerned, to make a comparison between memory and worldview in general. This is also part of life without which the human being cannot function. He does not choose to have or not to have a worldview: he simply has one. The question is only: Which one? If one does not choose consciously, one has nonetheless a mix of values that people encounter in society. If faith in Transcendence is denied, there are other alternatives, both religious as well as secular. The question as to why one chooses this and not that worldview, should be critically discussed in order to separate the wheat from the chaff. According to the contextualist, that is not possible, because a practice like religious belief is groundless and, as a practice, cannot be judged as to its truth.

From the assertion that there are no objective grounds for faith (in the strong sense of classical foundationalism as indisputable and incorrigible) contextualism draws the conclusion that there are as such no grounds that can be discussed with those of other worldviews. In fact, contextualism remains within the intellectual framework of foundationalism. Because there are no reasons in the strong sense of foundations which classical foundationalism wanted, contextualism concludes that there are no reasons at all. Practices float like boats on a groundless ocean and, with foundationalism, *every kind of universal rationality* has disappeared. One is left with only the many rationalities of the many practices.

I have already pointed out that practices can be viewed differently. That is what Alston did (ch. 2.4). Practices do have their own internal rationality. They themselves indicate the criteria for justification and rationality, as Thiemann shows. But that is not the whole story.

We make our claims from the perspective of a certain practice, but that does not mean that they are therefore contextually *relative*. Rather than viewing practices ontologically, we should view them epistemologically.

They are sources of criteria for (internal) justification and rationality but do not thereby entail that each has their own view of truth and reality. Therefore, I think the question is valid as to whether a given practice is as such a reliable source of true beliefs, as is the related question of whether it is rationally justifiable to assent to a practice like the Christian faith. The principle of presumption is valid not only within a practice but also with respect to the practice itself and therefore involves a *universal rationality* that goes beyond the boundaries of a practice. It is rational to take part in the Christian practice (form of life), even if that is no guarantee of its truth because it is always open to refutation. *Therefore, one can give reasons for his commitment*. Such reasons are not objective ones such as classical apologetics thought it could supply. Rather, they are reasons on the basis of which we have come to a certain belief regarding a certain matter in light of the information we have.

Having a commitment also entails *claims*. That is true for the Christian faith at any rate. One should distinguish between the factual aspect of the Christian faith and commitment to it. In her commitment, the believer claims that the Bible stories are historically anchored in God's history with Israel and in Jesus' historical existence. In his commitment the believer presupposes claims about a history of God with people. In one way or another we should be able to see that history in actual history. *Commitments presuppose claims that may or may not be true*.¹²

If it is recognized that commitments presuppose claims, then claims can play a role in commitment. One can point to events as a basis for one's commitment. Paul did that when he based the Christian faith on the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). Alston points to the fact that people actually perceive God. We cannot commit ourselves to something that we consider to be factually false.

My conclusion is that we can give reasons for a religious commitment and those who hold to different beliefs can explain why we believe. They can understand the reasons for a certain belief to a certain extent. There is, after all, a difference between understanding a claim or belief and seeing something in it, committing oneself to it. In addition, believers make claims in their commitment that are open to critique. We can ask someone why he believes in God. He can, in response, give his reasons, which are borrowed from that faith but can be discussed with others of different faiths and worldviews. Therefore, it is necessary to accept that there is a rationality that goes beyond the practice.

¹² Tiggs, *Reason and Commitment*, 43-49.

2.3. *Rationality that Goes Beyond the Practice*

Religious experience is hermeneutical; it is determined by a context or practice and needs to be judged as such. The Christian faith therefore has its own internal criteria to test itself, as Thiemann shows. But we should also be able to *discuss* our reasons for faith with those of other faiths and worldviews. That presupposes that those of other faiths or worldviews can *understand* the Christian faith to a certain extent. That is, as stated in the preceding section, possible. To discuss is something other than wanting to convince those of other faiths or worldviews that we ourselves are right, even though we do not have neutral reasons for our own faith. How such a discussion can take place we will see at the end of this chapter (§4). Here we are concerned with the condition for such a discussion with those of other faiths and worldviews. Such a discussion is possible only if there is *a universal rationality that goes beyond a specific practice*. If rationality is entirely practice-relative, then practices would exist in isolation alongside one another, each with its own rationality. Adherents of different religions would then find it difficult to engage in a critical discussion with one another. Does the notion of a universal rationality not lead us back into foundationalism? Is religion then not made subject to reason as the court of judgement over it as in the Enlightenment and in logical positivism? How can we, given the *practice-oriented rationality* used in this study, defend the notion that there is a *rationality that goes beyond the practice*? This is a rationality that makes communication between the Christian faith and adherents of other worldviews possible.

A. MacIntyre, who is seen as defending a contextualist position, acknowledges the problem and searches in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* for a solution.¹³ In his investigation into different traditions of justice and of practical rationality he argues that rationality is tradition-relative (7, 350). Each tradition, he maintains, can justify its position internally.

Each tradition can at each stage of its development provide rational justification for its central theses in its own terms, employing the concepts and standards by which it defines itself, but there is no set of independent standards of rational justification by appeal to which the issues between contending traditions can be decided. (351)

MacIntyre takes up the challenge of relativism (352), which is often seen as associated with this position: if the standards for rationality lie within the traditions themselves, then no issue between contending traditions can be settled (352).

MacIntyre argues that there can be debate between the different traditions or practices (I will use the term practice instead of tradition, as I have done throughout this study). One can move beyond one's own practice and learn from another if one comes to the conclusion that the other offers a better solution than one's own (366). The rationality of one's own practice is essentially a matter of progress that occurs as a result of the development of one's own practice (354). It is precisely when a practice reaches a stagnation point that one can learn from other practices. This is called MacIntyre's *principle of progress*.¹⁴

A practice undergoes developments. At first, certain persons and texts have authority. New situations, however, raise new questions which must be answered. If that does not succeed, then an epistemological crisis arises in a practice: a situation in which the old answers no longer suffice and a new theory and new answers are sought because the truth of a certain practice can no longer be maintained (354ff., 361). And here, according to MacIntyre, relativism falls short if it claims that people must always be persuaded by their own standards (364). He argues that people must transcend their own context in an 'epistemological crisis' and thus reject the autonomy of practices insofar as they are considered to self-enclosed entities.

In an 'epistemological crisis' one can be confronted with a view that comes from a contending practice. One can learn to understand its insights. That necessitates learning the language of the practice 'as a new and second first language' (364). One sees that, on the basis of the same standards according to which one's own practice comes into question, the other practice offers solutions for issues in which one's old practice had reached an impasse. Therefore, one should recognize that the other practice is superior (365). MacIntyre argues that people who remain in their own practice can go beyond it to become acquainted with the other practice through which solutions can be found for crises within one's own practice (366f.).

MacIntyre thus acknowledges that there is a universal rationality that goes beyond the practice. He shows (if we transfer his discussion of justice to the discussion between worldviews) how people can become

¹³ The references in the text are to this work. Stenmark characterizes MacIntyre's approach as 'dynamic contextualism' (Stenmark, *Rationality*, 345).

¹⁴ Thus Stenmark, *Rationality*, 349.

acquainted with another worldview by learning the language of the other as a second first language.¹⁵ In an epistemological crisis one engages in judgement and critique that go beyond one's own practice and certain views from another practice can be integrated into one's own. But how can this rationality that goes beyond a practice be described more precisely? MacIntyre uses the 'principle of progress.' As such, that principle points only to the moment at which one must go beyond one's own practice, namely, if there are no solutions within one's own practice for the questions that arise in new situations.

It is clear that universal rationality can no longer function, as in foundationalism, as a standard of content that can judge all practices. MacIntyre views rationality in a formal sense; he does not indicate that explicitly, but it is clearly implicit. How can we describe this formal universal rationality more precisely? In his *The Resources of Rationality* C.O. Schragg attempts this and argues for viewing rationality as *transversal rationality*.¹⁶

Schragg distances himself from the universal rationality of foundationalism:

In both these paradigms, classical metaphysical and modern epistemological, the presentation/representation of that which is universal and necessary finds its proper figure in that of a *vertical grounding*. There is either a grounding of such claims from above (from the vantage point of transcendent and ahistorical essences) or from below (the vantage point of transcendental, logically a priori, and equally ahistorical conditions). But whether grounded vertically from above or from below, we are proffered a perspective from the other side of history, a view from the perspective of an ahistorical subject that is nowhere and in no time. (164)

Instead of a universal rationality that is *universal* in the classical sense, the rationality that goes beyond one's own practice is *transversal*. The term transversal is used in mathematics to designate a line or plane which cuts across a system of lines or planes in one way or another without causing them consequently to converge (148). In philosophy the term is used for the dynamics of the consciousness and also for the interaction between social practices. The human consciousness is transversal in its connection with present, past and future, as narrative identity shows (ch. 4.2). Schragg points to Sartre who provided a philosophy of subjectivity but did use transversality to explain the unification of the consciousness.

Contra Husserl Sartre held that the ego is not a transcendental, identical pole of our conscious acting but is the result of a constituting act of the consciousness. He describes the unification of the consciousness as an 'achievement of a performative intentionality.' 'Consciousness ... is from bottom up intentional, unifies itself through its own resources by dint of transversal relays that bind present consciousness with its past' (149f.).

Transversality obtains also for social practices or groups, as Félix Guattari shows in connection with the organization of a psychiatric hospital. The different groups in the organization of the hospital exist in mutual communication without the communication being paralyzed by top-down decisions or by indecisiveness because the groups exist independent of one another (152f.). Schragg applies the concept of transversality to reason. He recasts the concept of universal reason by replacing universality with transversality:

Reason remains transversal to the various forms of our personal and social forms of life. It lies across them diagonally; it is neither vertically transcendent to them nor horizontally immanent within them. It operates 'between' them in such a manner that it is able to *critique, articulate and disclose* them without achieving a coincidence with any particular form of discourse, thought of action The dynamics of transversal rationality falls out as a convergence without coincidence, an interplay without synthesis, an appropriation without a totalization and a unification that allows for difference. Such is the transversal dynamics that motivates rationality as a conceptual struggle within communicative praxis. (158f.; *italic mine*; cf. 9)

We can see that rationality is no longer localized in the isolated subject, as was the case in Descartes and Kant. Schragg does not view the 'self' as an epistemological consciousness, as the control room of our knowing and acting, but situates it in the human subject in the space of communicative practice with its patterns of speaking and acting.¹⁷ Transversal rationality emerges as a place in time and space in which our multifarious beliefs and practices, thought patterns and fixed attitudes, prejudices and assessments converge in one point. *The web of this transversality is situated in the area of our social and institutional contexts*.¹⁸ In other words, rationality is to be localized in the life world of the human being with her 'social and institutional societal contexts' and points to the character of practice-oriented rationality as 'going beyond.' Transversal

¹⁵ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* ch. 19.

¹⁶ The references in the text are to this work.

¹⁷ J. Habermas' communicative reason is still very influenced by foundationalism and the requirement of universality. See Schragg's critique, *Resources*, 164f.

¹⁸ Van Huyssteen, *Rationality*, 136.

rationality can thus be connected with hermeneutics¹⁹ and with the hermeneutical view of religious experience given in this study.

In the quotation above we see, on the one hand, that we are no longer dealing with a rationality that stands above practices, as in foundationalism. Nor does transversal reason, on the other hand, exist exclusively within the practices (contextualism). Rather, it exists 'between' them, so that it is able 'to critique, articulate or disclose them.' Schragg thus indicates the three aspects of the texture and the dynamics of transversal rationality: *evaluative critique, engaged articulation and (incurative) disclosure*. He uses the adjective 'praxial' with these three aspects to distinguish the operationality of rationality as critique, articulation and disclosure from the 'subject-centred, epistemological-criteriological paradigm of modernity'.²⁰ *Evaluative critique* has to do with discernment or judgement of one's own practices and judging other practices in connection with one's own practice:

Some of our practices link up with other practices, exhibiting lines of continuity, resulting in accommodation or simple adoption. At other times they impinge upon other practices in such a manner as to occasion modification or transformation. At still other times contrasts of collisions of discursive and nondiscursive practices herald a veritable rupture and incommensurability, inviting an intervention via displacement or overturn.²¹

Articulation has to do with giving reasons, giving something meaning. Schragg views meaning not as a 'mental act issuing from a subject-centred reason' but as a 'social practice and communicative achievement'.²² *Disclosure* is closely connected with articulation. It concerns reference to the world, to the reality outside language and textuality.²³ It refers to a reality that leads us out of the limitations of the isolated subject.

As I did in chapter 3 (§4), rationality is closely connected here with *the judgement of the human being as a person*, which judgement is determined by one's communication practices and is directed at the understanding of himself in his speaking and acting and in relationships with others (50-67, 148-79). Thus, every practice has its own rules and thus its own rationality. If the idea of a transversal rationality that goes beyond practices is recognized, then assessments of other worldviews can be

made by either learning from them or criticizing them. How we should understand such a dialogue between adherents of different worldviews will be indicated at the end of this study (§4). I will apply Schragg's three aspects of transversal rationality, critique, articulation and disclosure, to the topic of this study (§§3-4).

A more precise definition of rationality that goes beyond practice as transversal rationality no longer consists, as we saw, in providing universal criteria for interreligious dialogue. In what follows I will not provide any criteria either for the discussion between different worldviews, criteria that would give a definitive answer to the question of religious truth. Rather, I will indicate *points of orientation* that can orient the discussion (§4). I would define the three aspects (critique, articulation, disclosure) of transversal rationality more closely as follows. Norms that *go beyond one's own practice* are the requirement of coherence and the avoidance of contradictions. These requirements apply to many practices such as science, politics, jurisprudence and also worldviews. These requirements should not be exaggerated. Logic is very important but does not have the final word. What coherence and the avoidance of contradictions entails appears, in addition, to depend heavily on the practice or worldview in question.²⁴ That does not mean that someone of a different practice cannot ask critical questions with respect to coherence and the avoidance of contradictions. How can a Christian, for instance, explain coherently that God is suprapersonal? And how can a Hindu explain the idea of reincarnation as coherent?²⁵ In addition to the criteria of coherence and the avoidance of contradictions, one can also point to the principle of presumption used in this study. Stenmark has described this principle explicitly as universal rationality. He emphasizes its going beyond practice by calling it a universal principle. What is rational for me is also rational for another in my situation and with my information.²⁶ This principle of presumption is valid for everyone and that is why it is a good description of a rationality that goes beyond practice. In this way universality (the principle applies to everyone) and the particularity of the different worldviews (their practice with their own practice-relative norms and the respect for the purpose of the worldview) can be connected with each other.

¹⁹ Schragg, *Resources*, ch. 3, 169f.

²⁰ Schragg, 'Transversal Rationality', 69.

²¹ Schragg, 'Transversal Rationality', 70. See also Schragg, *Resources*, chs. 3 and 6.

²² Schragg, 'Transversal Rationality', 71.

²³ Schragg, *Resources*, chs. 2-4 and Schragg, 'Transversal Rationality', 69ff. See also Van Huyssteen, *Rationality*, 135-39.

²⁴ Vroom, *Een waai van visies*, 76-78.

²⁵ On the issue of the suprapersonal God see W. Stoker, 'The Paradox of Complementarity in Tillich's Doctrine of God', 104-22; on reincarnation see Vroom, *Een waai van visies*, 83-90.

²⁶ Stenmark, *Rationality*, 352.

In short, through viewing rationality as transversal one is able to go beyond one's own practice and to engage in dialogue with those of other worldviews. This universal rationality does not exist above the parties, as in foundationalism. It is not connected with content but is only a formal rule and makes communication possible. I will now give a positive reason for faith or, to use Schragg's terms, an 'engaged articulation.'

3. An Argument from Religious Experience

The *what* of faith, the faith content, determines the *who*, the refigured person, and the *how* of his commitment. The *what* invokes the *who* and the *how*. To the *what*, the *who* and the *how* we must also add the *why*: Why do people believe?

Contra Tillich, my starting point for the accounting for faith is the testimony to Transcendence (ch. 3), the historically anchored faith, the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth (ch. 4). A practice-oriented view of rationality offers, in contrast to classical foundationalism, the possibility of accounting for the (historical) testimonies. We are no longer searching for certain, incontestable foundations but are starting with a situation that has developed historically, i.e. with a practice. Is it rational to partake in such a practice? Is the *judgement* of a person to assent to the Christian faith rational? G. Gutting remarks concerning the shift in the view of rationality:

There is no doubt that this sort of justification by 'judgment' rather than 'proof' is a legitimate way of drawing conclusions that plays a central role in many areas of human life Certainly, recent work on the nature of scientific rationality — especially that of Kuhn and Toulmin — has supported the conclusion that scientific justification fits the 'judgment' rather than the 'proof' model.²⁷

Toulmin has developed a model of argumentation, called the *substantial argument*, that is borrowed from the field of law.²⁸ In that model more elements come into play in argumentation than in the classical model of the syllogism with a major and a minor premiss which leads to the conclusion:

All men are mortal (major)
Socrates is a man (minor)
Therefore Socrates is mortal (conclusion).

The validity of a substantial argument is not determined by the formal logic of the syllogism but by the content of the argument, the claim about something or someone in which its degree of validity is indicated by a qualification (from 'conceivable' to 'necessary'); the grounds for the claim, the warrant, backing and possible rebuttal of the argument. This will be explained below.

I will apply Toulmin's model by unfolding a substantial argument from religious experience.²⁹ The source of the reason to believe is religious experience. For the claim 'people experience God's salvation in Jesus Christ' I will give reasons that make this claim acceptable. The argument is as follows:

The salvation that people experience is claimed by them to be God's salvation in Jesus Christ. To support that they give the following grounds: such an experience of Transcendence can be described phenomenologically as a saturated phenomenon; the Markan narrative (and more broadly, the New Testament) declares narratively that Jesus Christ is the living Son of God. In connection with that the church testifies to experiences with the living Christ who works in human beings and the world through his Spirit.

The *claim* is a statement about something or someone and here it is the experience of people that the salvation that they have experienced comes from God in Jesus Christ. The *ground* supports the claim and gives an explanation for it. In this case three grounds are mentioned: the experience of salvation from God is to be described as a saturated phenomenon (G1); the New Testament's proclamation of Christ, which in the foregoing was illustrated by the gospel of Mark (G2); the testimony of the church that grows out of that about the living Christ who now works through his Spirit (G3). With respect to the last ground, one can refer to the testimony of countless people in the history of Christianity. This can refer to both direct experiences of God as well as lasting experiences. G1, G2 and G3 go together and therefore this is a chain argument with a *cumulative* effect. The one ground reinforces the other.

Ground 1	Ground 2	Ground 3	Claim
Religious experience is a saturated phenomenon.	The gospel of Mark declares narratively that Jesus is the living Son of God.	The church witnesses that Christ lives and works through his Spirit.	People experience God's salvation in Christ.

²⁷ G. Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Scepticism*, 76.
²⁸ S.E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument*, esp. ch. 3.

²⁹ N.C. Murphy has specified Toulmin's model more closely and I will make use of him. Cf. N.C. Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion*, chs. 1-4.

The grounds must be true and to the point in connection with the claim. The grounds could also be advanced that are irrelevant with respect to the claim. Therefore, there must be a *principle of inference* or *warrant* that shows that these grounds have been correctly advanced for this claim and that they are also true and convincing. This is what Toulmin calls the 'warrant.' Most often, a warrant is a general statement that indicates why grounds of this nature are relevant for the specific claim. Other stories from antiquity that related a resurrection from the dead do not lead to a claim such as the one above about Jesus the Risen One. Therefore, there must be a warrant that indicates that these grounds are important for the claim, that justifies the step from the grounds to the claim.

If we claim that the river is frozen and produce as a ground for our claim that the temperature has been below Celsius for a long time, then the warrant is the natural law that the freezing point of water is 0° Celsius. This indicates that the ground is relevant for this claim. Or, we could take the example of a jury finding someone guilty. Finding someone 'guilty' and the sentence pronounced by the judge occur on the basis of grounds (the crime itself, witnesses who caught the perpetrator in the act, etc.). Here the warrant is the law and jurisprudence. The warrant in our example is for G2 and G3 that Scripture is the basic authoritative document for the Christian community.

Ground 1	Ground 2	Ground 3	Claim
Religious experience is a saturated phenomenon.	The gospel of Mark declares narratively that Jesus is the living Son of God.	The church witnesses that Christ lives and works through his Spirit.	People experience God's salvation in Christ.

Warrant

Scripture is the basic authoritative document for the church.

A warrant should indicate not only the correct connection between the ground and the claim but should also be true or at least plausible. Grounds and the warrant should be true or trustworthy. The warrant that I gave indicates primarily why these grounds can be advanced for this claim. But is the warrant itself true? That is why the warrant requires a *backing*. In the case of the frozen water, the natural law is backed by observation. That is all that is needed in this example for backing or justification. What is the backing for the law in jurisprudence and what is the

backing for Scripture? For the authority of Scripture, the church appeals to the Holy Spirit. This gives the believer the undoubted certainty that we are dealing with God's Word in the Bible and that is why this has authority. The danger of such an appeal as backing for the Scripture is that it, like foundationalism, produces an a priori absolute certainty. The appeal to the Spirit thus becomes a theological counterpart to the search for an undisputable foundation, which we criticized above (Introduction §1, chs. 2.4 and 2.5).

For the backing or, better, for the authority of the law and of Scripture we cannot refer to them. J. Derrida points out that in applying the law to a certain case the judge sometimes creates a new precedent by giving a new interpretation of the law. How can the judge defend that? Is that arbitrary? The judge gives a new interpretation based on justice, which is difficult to define. Does that not also apply, Derrida asks, to the creation of law as such? The latter is not based on a code that already exists. Derrida speaks here of a *mystical foundation of authority*. As an ultimate authority, there is a justice that cannot be defined by laws. The authority of the law is thus mystically founded in the sense that it escapes our grasp and our definitions. It is grounded in a justice that is difficult to define but which is present as a force. The judge can appeal to that for his interpretation. We obey the law not because it is just but because it has authority. The authority of the law rests on the trust that is given to it. One believes in it — that is its justification.³⁰ Derrida says elsewhere that:

the foundation of law ... is a 'performative' event that cannot belong to the set that it founds, inaugurates or justifies. ... Henceforth reason ought to recognize there what Montaigne and Pascal call an undeniable 'mystical foundation of authority.'³¹

If we do not want to fall into the trap of foundationalism, we must, in my view, formulate the authority of Scripture in a similar way. The authority of Scripture is not a property of Scripture any more than the authority of the law is a property of the law. The recognition of the authority of Scripture has to do with the trust that is given to it. One believes in it; it is a performative expression in which the speaker, in trusting in absolute Transcendence, recognizes it as the authoritative document for the faith community in trust. It is, as Derrida states, a 'performative' event that cannot belong to that which it grounds. The backing of the warrant is a mystical foundation.

³⁰ J. Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', 239-44.

³¹ J. Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge,' §22.

Ground 1	Ground 2	Ground 3	Claim
Religious experience is a saturated phenomenon.	The gospel of Mark declares narratively that Jesus is the living Son of God.	The church witnesses that Christ lives and works through his Spirit.	People experience God's salvation in Christ.
	Warrant Scripture is the basic authoritative document for the church.		
	Backing The mystical foundation of the authority of Scripture.		

Before I account briefly for the grounds and the backing, I will first round off our discussion of Toulmin's model of argumentation.

In addition to the elements we have already mentioned, i.e. claim, grounds, warrant and backing, there are two more: the qualification and possible rebuttal. The truth of the claim is dependent on the grounds and on the warrant with its backing. The warrant can be questioned and the grounds can be defective. Arguments such as these are fallible and do not have the mathematical certainty classical foundationalism required. If we assume that the ground and the warrant have a certain degree of reliability, then the force with which the claim is made must be provided with a *qualification*. Here we encounter the principle of proportionality, which, we concluded earlier, is not applicable in all cases. In everyday life some claims can be qualified on a scale from 'conceivable to necessary.' The judgement concerning the frozen water is a judgement with the force of (physical) necessity. The judge's finding someone 'guilty' needs to have the qualification 'beyond all reasonable doubt.' What is then the qualification in the argument on the basis of religious experience?

The reader will have noted that I have formulated the argument from religious experience as an *argument in the third person*. It can serve as a theological argument in an academic discussion or public discussion on religious experience. In that case, the claim that people experience God's salvation in Jesus Christ has as its qualification the force that belongs to the introduced grounds: '(very) probable.' If the claim is made in the first person, then it is a different matter. It then concerns a

belief in the *first person*. Let us give this argument a different form: the salvation that I experience I experience as God's salvation in Jesus Christ, for which I introduce the grounds mentioned above. The unconditional assent goes beyond the strength of the grounds. It is a complete assent, which is not the same thing as dogmatic assent. The qualification is not the 'degree of probability' but 'unconditional, absolute.' I will therefore include both possibilities in the qualification: '(very) probable/unconditional,' depending on whether the argument is seen as a theological argument in the third person or as the argument of a believer in the first person.

This argument is an example of *hypothetical* reasoning. It presents the grounds (G1, G2 and G3) as the best explanation for claiming that the salvation that people experience is from God in Christ. Because the argument can be refuted, the possible rebuttal must also be indicated. That obtains only if there is no better explanation for the experiencing of salvation than the grounds that have been indicated, the Christian hypothesis. The claim that the salvation that people experience is God's salvation in Christ will be explained by some as projection or as a matter of historical or social circumstances. Others will raise doubts about the believer's claims. After all, in their commitment believers make claims that are subject to criticism, such as the claim that the Christian faith is anchored in the history of God with Israel and the historical life of Jesus.

The structure of the substantial argument is complete as follows:

Grounds	Qualification	Claim
	Warrant	Possible
	Backing	Rebuttal

In line with the above structure of the substantial argument model, the argument from religious experience is as follows:

Ground 1	Ground 2	Ground 3	Qualification	Claim
Religious experience is a saturated phenomenon.	The gospel of Mark declares narratively that Jesus is the living Son of God.	The church witnesses that Christ lives and works through his Spirit.	(very) probable or unconditional	People experience God's salvation in Christ.
Warrant				
Scripture is the basic authoritative document for the church.				
Possible Rebuttal				
Unless a socio-logical or psychological explanation is better, or the Christian faith is not historically anchored, which has not been proven.				
Backing				
The mystical foundation of the authority of Scripture.				

The salvation that people experience is God's salvation in Jesus Christ (claim), for which the explanatory grounds may be adduced: that the experience of Transcendence can be described as a saturated phenomenon, that the gospel (of Mark) gives a narrative explanation that Jesus is the risen and living Son of God and that the testimony of the church that flows from that Christ lives and works through his Spirit. These grounds must be true or plausible and also relevant for this claim. Therefore, the principle of inference, the warrant that the Scripture is the basic authoritative document of the church, is given. The grounds thus fit the claim. The warrant shows that the grounds are correctly introduced for this claim. This warrant is backed by the 'mystical' foundation of the authority of Scripture. The qualification of the claim is, as a theological argument in the third person, '(very) probable,' but as a religious judgement of a believer in the first person, then the qualification becomes 'unconditional.' The possible rebuttal is also indicated. This argument presents the Christian-theistic hypothesis (G1, G2 and G3) as the best explanation for the fact that people experience God's salvation in Christ, unless there are other explanations that are better and can rebut the given explanation.

Is faith rational? The religious experience of the person involved (argument in the first person) or of people (the argument in the third person) is the source of the reason to believe. I will now give a summarizing commentary of the grounds, the backing, the qualification and the possible rebuttal.

As a *first ground* we can point to the intelligibility of an experience of Transcendence. It is not an irrational event but an experience characterized by trans-intentionality and can be described as a saturated phenomenon (ch. 3.5.2). As a *second ground* I introduce the story as a narrative explanation. In the foregoing I have shown that a narrative such as Mark's provides a narrative explanation that Jesus as the Risen One is the living Son of God (ch. 4.3.2).

With respect to the *third ground*, one can refer to the countless witnesses in the history of Christianity who testify to experiences of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. I refer in this connection to Jesus' farewell speech in the gospel of John, in which he promises the Holy Spirit (John 14-17), and to the Acts of the Apostles, which tells of the life in the Spirit. That is the beginning of a countless line of witnesses to such experiences within and outside of the church.

The *qualification* is, in the case of a first person argument, formulated as 'unconditional.' That it is God whom people experience is an affirmative, absolute-relative affirmation (ch. 5.4). It has to do with the ultimate concern of the speaker.

The possible rebuttal of the argument points to its hypothetical character. This indicates that this accounting for faith can be characterized as an 'inference to the best explanation.' Taken together, the grounds indicated are the best explanation for the fact that people experience salvation in Christ, unless there is a better explanation for it. A rebuttal of the argument would have to be that the concept religious experience is self-contradictory. If that is so, then it is not rationally responsible to speak about religious experience and the argument is therefore void. In the foregoing, however, I have argued that religious experience is not a self-contradictory concept but an experience with a trans-intentional aspect (ch. 3.2).

Another possible rebuttal is that a naturalistic explanation of the Christian faith is better than my theistic explanation that God is source of the experience of salvation. I pointed out already that Philippe and Proudfoot do indeed argue that a scientific explanation is better than the theistic one. Proudfoot views experience as a subjective feeling to which we add an explanation. In describing religious experience he takes the explanation of the believer seriously (that it is an experience of Christ) but then argues that he, as an expert, has a better explanation, i.e. a historical or cultural explanation for why people experience salvation in Christ. Proudfoot, however, does not clarify why a historical or cultural explanation is better than the Christian hypothesis of the believer (first person) and of

theology (third person).³² One of the grounds was that experience of God's salvation are not irrational but can be described as saturated phenomenon.

Proudfoot would be right if, for example, the believer's claim about experiencing salvation is questioned. That is indeed what happened in the critique of religion made by Nietzsche, Marx and Freud. It occurred also in some historical criticism that viewed the historical anchoring of the Christian faith as very questionable. In the scope of this study, which belongs to the genre of positive apologetics, it is hardly possible to go into all possible rebuttals of the Christian faith. That is a matter for negative apologetics. I will limit myself to the possible rebuttals that are directly connected with the central ideas in the accounting for faith given here: religious experience and the historical anchoring of the Christian faith.

One possible rebuttal of my theistic explanation of religious experience is that a psychological (Freud) or sociological (Marx) explanation is better than the religious or theistic explanation. I will first look at the theory of religion in Freud and Marx. Next I will discuss the possible rebuttal made by historical criticism insofar as it questions the historical reliability of the Christian faith. If the objections are correct and convincing, then the judgement that it is rational to believe needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Is Faith an Illusion?

Since Jean Bodin (1530-1596) people have attempted to find a natural explanation for religion, i.e. without reference to Transcendence.³³ Here the idea that religion has cognitive content, as something that says something about human beings and the world, is rejected. E.B. Taylor (1832-1917) and J.G. Frazer (1854-1941) argued that religions of oral cultures are primitive science in that they, as 'savage philosophers' (Taylor), attempted to give an explanation of the mysteries of human beings and the world. These explanations of human beings and the world have, however, been refuted by contemporary natural science.

If religion, according to Taylor and Frazer, is being replaced by science, why are there still adherents to religion? Freud (1856-1939) and Marx (1818-1883) explored this question and presented the theory that

religion nourishes a false need and rests on projection. If the cause of religious fantasy is unmasked, then religion itself will disappear, at least if people do not want to base their lives on illusion. There are also critics of religion such as E. Durkheim and D.S. Wilson who do see religion as illusion but emphasize the continuing importance of religion for society. Thus, in his *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society* (2002), Wilson defends the view that religion is not a sign of mental illness but testifies to the healthy functioning of the biological and culturally well-adjusted human spirit.³⁴ Freud and Marx deny this and see religion as emerging from the powerlessness of the human being. They do not view religion as an autonomous given that is valuable in itself. Rather, they seek to explain religion below its surface and on the basis of non-religious factors. For Freud, that is the reality of wish-fulfilment and the neurotic need of the individual. For Marx, it is the social reality, the social alienation of which religion is the expression.

Freud calls religion 'the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.'³⁵ In *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913) he investigates two customs of primitive peoples: taboos and totems. Both point, according to Freud, to the ambivalence of human feelings. Oral cultures believe in demons, but these do not exist, according to Freud. Like the gods, people themselves have created these demons.³⁶ He shows that there is correspondence between the taboos of oral cultures and the taboos of modern compulsive neurotics. Both experience the ambivalence of feelings. Primitive peoples surround their dead with various taboos: for instance, the dead are not to be touched or their names said aloud. Such taboos are, like neurotic symptoms, ambivalent: they are a compromise between joy and sadness over the death of the deceased. In the primitive person this ambivalence is expressed not in terms of self-reproach but in the belief that the soul of the deceased has become an evil spirit who is hostile to his surviving relatives. One's own hostility is projected on to the deceased and thus the internal conflict is resolved.

The process is dealt with... by the special psychical mechanism known in psycho-analysis ... by the name of 'projection'. The hostility, of which the survivors know nothing and moreover wish to know nothing, is ejected from internal perception into the external world, and thus detached from them and pushed on to someone else. It is no longer true that they are rejoicing to be rid of the dead man; on the contrary, they are mourning for him, but,

³² Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, ch. 6. See above ch. 2.3.

³³ See J.S. Preuss, *Explaining Religion*.

³⁴ Cited by Phillipse, *Atheistisches Manifest*, 189.

³⁵ S. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Works 21, 43.

³⁶ S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Works 13, 24.

strange to say, he has turned into a wicked demon, ready to gloat over their misfortunes and eager to kill them.³⁷

This is how Freud explains how the belief in demons arose: out of the ambivalence of feelings towards the deceased.

Freud writes about the origin of the belief in gods in connection with totems in *Totem and Taboo*. His starting point is a hypothesis found in Darwin, according to whom people originally lived in primitive hordes, led by a despotic father. On the one hand, the latter provided protection but, on the other, the young men were also sexually frustrated. The jealous sons killed the father and took his wives as their own. The patricide was followed by remorse and guilt. In the totem they found a substitute father and the symbol that they began to worship. As a remembrance of their act they were forbidden to kill the totem, the substitute father. They also distanced themselves from the possession of the women who belonged to the totem. Thus the dead father was restored in honour and they even elevated him to the status of God.³⁸ This is how religion originated: from the childish desire for a protective father. The sons' consciousness of guilt gave rise at the same time to the prohibition against killing the totem and incest.

Freud thought that he could indicate the presence of the conflict between the rebellious son and the father and the son's consciousness of guilt in Christianity as well. Christ offered his life to redeem his brothers from original sin. Through his reconciling death the son also attained the goal of his wishes directed against the father. Through his death the son himself became God, replacing his father. Christianity is the religion of the son. According to Freud, the old totem meal has been revived in the Christian celebration of the Eucharist and the son is eaten instead of the father.³⁹

In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) Freud returns to the topic of the father-son relationship. If in *Totem and Taboo* the topic was the child's need for a father, according to *The Future of an Illusion*, the mature person also, because of his helplessness, needs a father figure. Freud points here primarily to the helplessness of the adult over against the power of nature. The human being defends himself against the power of nature by humanizing those powers and ascribing passions and will to them.⁴⁰ The

³⁷ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Works 13, 62f.

³⁸ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Works 13, 147-50; Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Works 21, 22f.

³⁹ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Works 13, 154f.

⁴⁰ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Works 21, 15-17, 22.

issue here is not compulsive neurotic behaviour but wish-fulfilment. In his need for safety the human being projects a protective father figure in heaven as a God who watches over us. Religious faith claims that 'over each one of us there watches a benevolent Providence which ... will not suffer us to become a plaything of the overmight and pitiless forces of nature.'⁴¹ Freud also discusses neuroses in *The Future of an Illusion* in connection with religion: 'Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity, like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father.'⁴² He hopes that human beings will conquer this neuroses. The human being who has traded in the old God for reason can be liberated from this collective neurosis and in that way may free his powers for life on this earth: 'We leave Heaven to the angels and the sparrows.'⁴³

Has Freud rebutted the idea that God or, more broadly, Transcendence, is the source of religious experience? It is undeniable that religion has a psychological function. Religious people also display neurotic behaviour. In this respect Freud's contribution to healthy religion is very important. The flaw in Freud's theory of religion is that he reduces religion to its psychological function. His psychological explanation of religion is reductionistic in that he reduces religion into a psychological need. Religion is nothing else than an answer to deep emotional conflicts and human weaknesses. What Freud analyzes as neuroses he applies to the religion of oral cultures, as we saw. That is disputable, first of all because he presupposes a static, ahistorical human nature that is the same everywhere. Neuroses are, however, culturally determined, depending on the society in which the neurotic person participates, as Peter Winch writes:

A psychoanalyst who wished to give an account of neuroses amongst, say, the Trobriand Islanders, could not just apply without further reflection the concepts developed by Freud for situations arising in our own society. He would have first to investigate such things as the idea of fatherhood among the islanders and take into account any relevant aspects in which their ideas differed from that current in his own society. And it is almost inevitable that such an investigation would lead to some modification in the psychological theory appropriate for explaining neurotic behaviour in this new situation.⁴⁴

In addition, Freud presupposes in *Totem and Taboo* that the psychological development of an individual can be compared with the development

⁴¹ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Works 21, 19.

⁴² Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Works 21, 43.

⁴³ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, Works 21, 50.

⁴⁴ P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 90.

of a social group. But these are two different entities that are difficult to compare with each other. An individual develops within the scope of the lifetime of a human being. A social group develops over centuries and involves a whole civilization.

Freud's starting point is projection. According to *The Future of Illusion*, the adult person is said to project the father of his youth on to the screen of heaven as God the Father. Another way of looking at this theme emerges from the parable of the prodigal son in Luke's gospel. When the son returns, as an adult to his father's house, his relationship with his father changes. The son is not someone who seeks the safety of his youth but enters into a mature relationship with his father. He receives a ring on his finger as a sign of his joint management of the home (Luke 15:22). Before I say anything more about projection, I will first examine Marx' sociological theory of religion.

Marx points out in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) that Feuerbach starts from the fact that religious alienation, the doubling of the world into a religious and a secular world. Feuerbach wants to bring the religious world back to its secular foundation. The cause of the projection is that people want to explain the internal conflict in human existence. Marx criticizes Feuerbach because he views the human being abstractly, separate from his social context. This is Marx' own contribution to the critique of religion. Thus he writes in the sixth thesis: 'Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.'⁴⁵

Marx explains religion on the basis of the alienated social situation of the human being. Important for his theory of religion is his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843/4). The human being makes religion. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of the human being who has not yet found himself or has lost himself again. It has to do with the concrete human being as part of the state and society. State and society are a 'perverted world' and therefore they produce a 'perverted world-consciousness,' namely, religion. Marx states this in the following way:

The basis of irreligious criticism is *man makes religion*, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and the self-feeling of the man who has either not yet found himself, or else (having found himself) has lost himself once more. But man is no abstract being

⁴⁵ K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach, On Religion*, 71.

squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society produce religion, a *perverted world consciousness*, because they are a *perverted world*

Continuing in this line, Marx calls religion the opium of the people:

Religious distress is at the same time the *expression* of real [economic] distress and the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is required for their *real* happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the *demand to give up a condition which needs illusions*.⁴⁶

Religion has its roots in the social situation. On the one hand, it alienates the human being from his own being but, on the other, is itself the result of a deeper, social alienation. Marx analyzes this alienation in his *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844).⁴⁷ In the capitalist economy the worker produces continually more but as a result becomes poorer. His work becomes a trade good that is sold, bought and becomes the property of others. He sells his labour for wages through which he can purchase other things. As a worker, he becomes cheap goods, but he has to offer his services to others. That leads to his alienation from himself. The social alienation continues to have an effect in religion. Just as his labour is sold to others, so also his feeling of self-worth. The human being places his moral ideals, his virtues and feeling of self-worth outside of himself and attaches them to an imaginary being he calls God. Religion is like opium, an escape from the social misery and at the same time the human being impoverishes himself in religion by projecting the good in himself on to God.

Religion is therefore not to be considered in itself but is a secondary phenomenon, a reflection of earthly, material needs. It functions as an ideology that provides reasons for maintaining the unjust status quo in society. This view emerges from Marx' theory of history, 'historical materialism,' everything that we call the history of the mind: religion, family, state, justice, morality, science, art, etc. is only a reflection of the material circumstances in which human beings lived in the different periods of history. In addition, Marx distinguishes between the base and superstructure of society. The economic factors form the base of the society and determine the division of labour. That also causes, as stated, social alienation in the capitalist economy: through labour becoming a trade good, with the result that religion becomes the opium of the people.

⁴⁶ K. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, On Religion*, 41f.

⁴⁷ K. Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 120-34.

Has Marx rebutted the idea that God or, more broadly, Transcendence is the source of religious experience? According to later historical materialism (and also according to Marx himself) there is no direct, one-way causal relationship between the base and the superstructure of society. Rather, there is interaction and dialectic. That does not, however, change the fact that, according to Marx, the economy is finally decisive for religion. Religion is not something that has value in itself and can be considered in itself. It can be explained only by factors outside of itself. Like Freud, Marx also declares religion to be a symptom of what lies underneath and, for Marx, that is the alienation arising from the labour situation in the capitalist economy. Complex phenomena such as religion are ultimately reduced to economic factors.

Marx analyzes only the Christian religion but holds that he has thereby unmasked all religion as illusion. He assumes that all promise people a better life, a heaven after death. That is incorrect. In the early history of Israel and in certain tribal religions the doctrine of life after death does not exist. Central to this criticism of religion is the concept of alienation as a consequence of the capitalist economy. Alienation produces religion. In societies that have a different social form without the division of labour and private property, there should, according to this theory of religion, be no need for religion and there should actually not be any religion. But there is no historical evidence for this. One could supplement Marx' explanation with that of Freud, but there are objections to Freud's theory, as stated above. One could also point to Durkheim's reductionistic theory of religion. In his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) Durkheim explains religion as a social need, basing his claim on primitive religions in Australia.⁴⁸ The option that God, gods or Transcendence could be the source of religious experience is not even entertained by Marx in his reductionistic explanation of religion.

The starting point for both theories of religion, Freud's psychological and Marx' sociological, is the theory of projection. This theory is based on a philosophical epistemological theory or theory of perception that is disputable. Contemporary critics of religion also view religion as an illusion, appealing to the theory of projection, which excludes God as being the source of religious experience.⁴⁹

Projection psychologists see a division between the internal and external world of the modern person. For primitive peoples, who see the world

as spiritual, as populated with gods, spirits and demons, it is a different matter. For them there is only the external world, but that has a property that will later appear to be ascribed only to humans as soul, life, personality.⁵⁰ I will demonstrate the shortcomings of the theory of projection, employing hereby the study in cultural psychology by H.M.M. Fortmann on religious perception and the so-called religious projection: *Als ziende onzienlijke*.⁵¹

Feuerbach (1804-1872) claims, as stated above, that it is not God who has created human beings but, rather, human beings who have created God as a projection of their own needs and desires. Proponents of the theory of projection point to the 'blurred vision' of our perception. People attempt to explain the individual and cultural differences or inaccuracies in our perception. People ascribe 'subjective' feelings to the 'objective' neutral world. For our 'internal' processes or experiences we provide a reality 'outside' ourselves, 'without being conscious of this 'subjectivation' or *Hinauslegung* (II, 27). The explanations offered by Freud and Marx given above indicated the reason for the doubling of reality by believers.

The idea of projection proceeds on the basis of a philosophical epistemological theory, according to which the subject stands over against an object and the consciousness is thought to be a container with cognitive and affective content that is separate from the external world. The objective world is said to be subjectivized by our perception. Fortmann clarifies the incorrectness of the theory of projection as an explanation for religious perception using the example of the Sunday hunter. The hunter mistakes a somewhat jagged, grey stone for a hare. When the bullet ricochets and the hunter comes closer, he sees his mistake. According to the projection theory, he has projected his image of 'hare' on to the stone. If that is indeed so, it still remains unclear, as Fortmann correctly remarks, why the hunter did not mistake another hunter or a telephone pole for a hare (I, 378).

In this study I have used a different theory of perception, that of existential phenomenology with its intentionality for life (ch. 3.2). Consciousness is not a container of cognitive and affective content but is consciousness-of; human beings and the world do not exist separately from each other but are involved with each other, due to the different forms of intentionality. Our mood is not an internal or external something but something

⁴⁸ See Pals, *Seven Theories*, 88-123.

⁴⁹ Philipsee, *Altheistisch Manifest*, 161, 164.

⁵⁰ H.M.M. Fortmann, *Als ziende de onzienlijke* [As One Who Sees the Unseen] I, 462f.

⁵¹ The references in the text are to this work, unless otherwise indicated.

that discloses our existence as our participation in the world. Feelings or representations are not locked up in myself but are directed intentionally at the world and at myself. A phenomenological theory of perception gives a better explanation for the so-called projection of the hunter. He does not project the hare on to a grey stone, but he makes a mistaken perception. Perception is not a one-way road but a two-way road. *The stone resembled a hare and because of that the hunter was led to attach his image of the hare to the jagged grey stone.* The image 'hare' does not precede the perception but is invoked through it. That is why he mistakes the stone and not another hunter or a telephone pole for a hare. Fortmann believes that there are prematurely closed, one-sided and frozen perceptions, but we cannot speak of projection:

It is never so that one sees what one wants. The image of perception must always draw us out Neither (the primitive person nor the Christian) engages in projection. To that extent both see and not just fantasize or reason; they see objective reality, that is, one aspect that reality allows one to see. And there is no doubt that primitive peoples experienced their gods, spirits and demons as objectively real. (I, 563)

Perception in our scientific culture is different from that of the primitive human being. On the basis of what we observe, according to Fortmann, we must state that the primitive process of observation was prematurely closed:

The primitive person saw demons more or less like the hunter saw a hare where there was a stone. The situation seemed to him to demand the influence of mysterious gods and demons, because he could not yet unravel the causality that science would later discover. It was thus indeed to help his need ... that led him to accept gods, but nothing shows that he distorted the world subjectively. He saw what he saw, a spiritual world, a world more powerful than he, in which things were guided by an intention.

The projection psychologist says: the primitive observer has incorrectly ascribed his own subjectivity to the external world and thus in an animistic way made the world like himself by spiritualizing it. The phenomenologist answers, how could he see it as spiritual if it did not reveal itself to him as spiritual? It is possible to speak of projecting animism if the subjective inner being has been divorced from the objective externality. (I, 565)

Religious perception is of a special nature. We do not perceive God or gods in the same way that we perceive colours or forms. I defined religious experience as a saturated phenomenon, for there are so many horizons that it is impossible to state definitively what the event of an experience of God is. The phenomenon overwhelms me as when I look at the

sun (cf. ch. 3.5.2 of this study). A religious perception or experience — and that obtains for both direct, momentary experiences and indirect, lasting experiences — has to do with the perception or experience of the mystery of things, of their insufficiency (II, 32ff.). Religion is different from science on this point. The latter attempts to solve the *enigmatic aspects* of the world; religion attempts to articulate the *secret* of things, their insufficiency. Oral cultures already experienced the insufficiency of reality and of human powerlessness. Their belief in spirits and gods is not a projection but an experience of reality, invoked by the inadequacy of the world. Myths are not fantasy stories but provide an interpretation of the mystery of things. Gods can, however, die and others take their place. Myths can become incredible over time and be replaced by other religious perceptions and myths. Religious perception is, in general, not to be seen as a projection but can sometimes simply be a case of incorrect perception, like the hunter's perception was, because it is prematurely closed. That is why religion must always be tested critically with respect to its reliability. I have therefore indicated above that religious testimony is to be continually tested with respect to its reliability (ch. 3.3 of this study).

In short, it seems impossible to exclude, on the basis of psychological or sociological grounds, God as the source of the experience of salvation in Christ as I have defended it in this study. Freud and Marx ignore the *content* of religion and pay attention only to its *function*. That is one-sided and results in a reductionistic theory of religion.

Critics of religion often hold that religious studies can only produce a reductionistic theory of religion. That is not the case, as the theories of religion given by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Mircea Eliade and Clifford Geertz show.³² Explanations of religion such as those of Freud and Marx can, however, also yield new perspectives. The psychologist and the sociologist can trace *certain* forms of religious experience to neuroses, alienation and projection. The critique of religion needs, therefore, to be part of a critical theology. Another possible rebuttal that is affected very directly by my argument is that of historical criticism insofar as it questions the historical reliability of the Christian faith. If that is the case, then one needs, as stated, to adjust one's judgement that it is rational to believe.

³² Pals, *Seven Theories*, chs. 5-7.

Does the Christian Faith Have a Historically Reliable Basis?

Tillich's remark from almost sixty years ago on the continually changing results of historical research stills holds true for discussions on this issue. Doubts about the reliability of the Biblical givens on Israel's history are still a matter of debate among exegetes. There is also disagreement concerning the events, acts and words of the historical Jesus. I will give two examples, one from Old Testament studies and one from New Testament studies on the gospel of Mark. A thorough discussion requires a separate study.

The Old Testament scholar R. Albertz remarks that many of his colleagues are fascinated by Biblical theology because they can use it as a means of immunization against radical historical criticism.⁵³ He, however, has investigated Israel's religious history, as is apparent from his *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit* (I/II) (1992). In a discussion on this he poses the question of whether 'the theology of the Old Testament' can still obtain as the core subject of Old Testament studies and whether it is not better to replace it with a — more theological than has been the case until now — history of religion.⁵⁴ The discipline 'Theology of the Old Testament' is not able, among other things, to absorb the results of historical criticism and to make them fruitful for Old Testament studies and cannot make any contribution to theology and church.⁵⁵ A history of the religion of Israel can, in his view, reconcile history and theology.⁵⁶

With respect to Mark, I gave a narrative reading of this in which I referred to the world behind the text (ch. 4.3.2). On the discussion of the historical reliability of Mark the New Testament scholar J.S. Vos wrote: 'Whoever, with the early church, views Mark as Peter's translator will ascribe historical value to Mark's version of the gospel; whoever thinks that Mark is further from the first disciples will view it much more as fiction.'⁵⁷ The discussion on the historical reliability of Mark has two extremes. R. Pesch sees Mark as a conservative editor who, for the most part, used written sources without reworking them either in a literary or theological way. W. Schnithals sees Mark as a 'Jesus romance' with a clear theological accent.⁵⁸ The exegete M. Hengel endorses a middle posi-

tion, as was done in chapter 4 of this study. He points in Mark to the almost impossible combination of, on the one hand, a good literary written narrative with dramatic tension and, on the other, a reputable writtenness to tradition and history.⁵⁹ Hengel considers it wrong that we should be forced to choose between preaching and historical reporting. The 'theological' contribution of the evangelist is that he does both: he preaches by narrating and writes history in which he proclaims the gospel. This model of historiography, which consists in the unity of narrative and proclamation, is also to be seen in the Old Testament,⁶⁰ as Albertz shows in his *Religionsgeschichte Israels*.

From these examples I draw the conclusion that it is not unreasonable to proceed on the basis that there is a world behind the text of Scripture, which refers to the actual history of an acting God. We do not have any record of the past that shows the past as a photocopy would. There is also no incongruity between the events of that time and the narrated story about it such as we would find the writer had created his story like a fiction writer does. Elsewhere I have used Hans Frei's term history-like in reference to the biblical narratives, by which I mean that they describe God's journey with Israel and in Jesus of Nazareth with narrative imagination on the basis of old traditions to which sagas, legends, apocalyptic traditions, etc. belong, in addition to historical facts.⁶¹ In short, the claim that people experience God's salvation in Christ is rational, given the grounds introduced for that and the fact that the possible rebuttals made by Freud, Marx and historical criticism are not such that they make this claim unreasonable.

4. Accounting for Faith in a Pluralistic World

The presentation of the substantial argument on the basis of religious experience rounds off the hermeneutical-phenomenological accounting for faith. In the motto for this chapter Van Huissteen remarks that our own experiences are rationally compelling. Beliefs are person-relative. The believer claims that his belief is rational. With respect to the question of whether it is rational to believe, this accounting for faith points to the religious experience of people as the source of the reason to believe.

⁵³ R. Albertz, 'Hat die Theologie des Alten Testaments doch noch eine Chance?', 178.

⁵⁴ R. Albertz, 'Religionsgeschichte Israels statt Theologie des Alten Testaments!', 6.

⁵⁵ Albertz, 'Hat die Theologie', 177f.

⁵⁶ Albertz, 'Religionsgeschichte Israels', 23.

⁵⁷ In an e-mail to me, 23 April, 2004.

⁵⁸ M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 31.

⁵⁹ Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 39.

⁶⁰ Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, 41.

⁶¹ W. Stoker and H.M. Vroom, *Verhulde Waarheid* [Veiled Truth], 78, 84, 103f.

The salvation that Christians experience is God's salvation in Christ. For that we referred to the phenomenological description of the experience of Transcendence as a saturated phenomenon, the narrative explanation of the biblical story that Jesus is the living Son of God, and to testimonies of experiences of God in the course of history. The assent to faith is affective, which does not mean, according to the principle of presumption, that it is not rational.

We have thus given a reason for the commitment of believers. That is, indeed, not an objective reason in the strong sense of classical foundationalism. Nor is it objective in the weak sense proposed by Alston. Alston pointed to the direct perception of God in which there is an objective aspect in the sense that something or someone presents it- or himself. My argument from religious experience proceeds primarily from the lasting experience of, for example, the Breton women in Gauguin's painting, who had just heard a sermon on Jacob's wrestling with a stranger. It is objective in the sense that it rests on a testimony which we, with the means available to us, attempt to establish whether it is reliable in the double sense of historically so (the question of historical criticism) and existentially so (a question of the faith community and the believer herself) and which is open to possible rebuttal.

In the Introduction to this volume I pointed to two challenges for the accounting for faith. Because of the minority position of the Christian faith in today's world, the question has become focused even more on one's own experience. Therefore, experience is the starting point for this accounting for faith. The second challenge concerns the question of how this accounting for faith can function in a pluralistic world of secular and religious worldviews. In connection with that I will make three remarks about dialogue with those of other faiths and worldviews. I will limit myself to drawing some conclusions from the foregoing.

What are the consequences of the view of rationality employed in this study, the principle of presumption, for interreligious dialogue? I will cite the following three:

1. The question of religious truth cannot be decided definitively. A certain form of exclusivism is dogmatism.
2. Consensus cannot be the goal, because plurality is given with the human 'condition.'
3. In the dialogue with those of other worldviews not only is mutual understanding of and for one another's view possible but also engaging in mutual assessment, learning and critique.

Allow me to make the following remark first. The argument that I have given for the Christian faith is a *worldview argument* and not an objective, universal argument such as that which classical apologetics had in mind. But can worldview arguments be discussed in the public sphere? Is that not something that belongs in the private sphere? The objection of liberals like R. Audi that no worldview arguments can be used in the public sphere does not hold. He argues that this can lead to infractions of the right to equality owed to those of other worldviews, because they cannot sufficiently understand a worldview argument. After all, people appeal to their own tradition.⁶² This view, however, is incorrect, as we saw. People can understand another religion or worldview sufficiently to engage in dialogue with one another (§2.2). In addition, the argument presupposes an abstract concept of humanity, as if people can simply put their ultimate concern on hold when confronted with issues dealing with the public sphere. It is precisely there that worldview questions need to be discussed, in relation to issues such as education and health care with its ethical questions. A Jew, a Christian, a Muslim or a humanist, etc., cannot, therefore, limit his beliefs to the private sphere. The secular person does not do that either. Engaging in dialogue about one another's world in the public realm is necessary for the quality of a good society. The requirement for such a dialogue is, therefore, not that this occurs in a neutral way through universal philosophical arguments — that is an impossible, unrealistic demand — but that it occurs in a *rational way*.⁶³

The question of religious truth cannot be decided definitively. A certain form of exclusivism is dogmatism. One can argue for the necessity of mutual dialogue between worldviews and religions on the basis of social and religious considerations. The following considerations from a practice-oriented rationality can be added to this.

Sometimes the claim of other religions to religious truth is in conflict with the Christian faith. The view of God in the Christian faith cannot be reconciled with, for example, that of Buddhism and that of some traditions within Hinduism. The principle of presumption can be formulated as follows: it is rational to assent to something *unless there is a better alternative*. Is Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism a better alternative for the Christian? The problem is that there are no general criteria on the

⁶² R. Audi and N. Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square*, 1-66.

⁶³ On this point I differ from D. Tracy, who requires that the theologian make universal philosophical arguments for public debate (D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 64). For an argument for critical openness in believers for a public discussion of religion see R.A. Kuipers, *Critical Faith*.

basis of which we can decide which religion is the true one. If such criteria are given, they often prove to have been influenced by one's own religion. In connection with dialogue there are two points that should guide us in such discussions, but these are not intended (and cannot be intended) to decide the question of truth. Guiding principles for dialogue with other religions (and secular worldviews) are: 1. *Theoretical suitability* in giving direction with respect to fundamental questions of life. How does a particular religion or worldview give insight into the question of why we are on earth? 2. *Existential suitability*: do they provide a life orientation in such a way that they can make life good in the qualitative sense? That obtains first of all for the adherents of the worldview or religion in question but also indirectly for those adherents of other worldviews who experience its negative influence in society.

The fact that the question of truth cannot be decided so easily and quickly is not a reason to cease seeing one's own religion as the true one. The insight that the question of truth cannot be decided does not necessarily have to lead to relativism. Alston is right, in my view, when he argues that it is rational to stick to one's own tradition.⁶⁴

A Christian accounts for his faith by giving a positive reason for it, as has been done above. Trying it is itself the test: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The practice of faith has its fruits, the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5). For Paul, life in the Spirit is the participation in the new age that has begun in Jesus. That is still a matter of living on the basis of the promise of the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God. The truth of the Christian faith will be — and that is the promise — confirmed definitely only in the eschaton, when God's Kingdom has come.

Because the question of truth regarding religion and worldviews cannot be decided, no religion or worldview can claim *exclusivity* in the sense of the exclusion of other religions or worldviews. Adherents of other religions can give an accounting similar to what I have done for the Christian faith. Reasons that are given for one's own faith are, after all, derived from one's own religion. According to a practice-oriented rationality, rationality cannot guarantee the truth. Therefore it is unreasonable to believe that one has the whole truth and the other not at all, as fundamentalists, among others, do. Religious fundamentalism fails completely in the obligation to use the human capacity for reason responsibly. It refuses to adjust its judgements on the basis of a possible rebuttal of the

⁶⁴ Alston, *Perceiving God*, 274.

fundamentalist's claim that he has the right to use violence. What fundamentalists deny is that people make claims that are always fallible. After all, we do not have a God's eye view of the world.

Thinkers such as A. Plantinga and R. van Woudenberg defend the term *exclusivism* but use it in a different way from how I have used it above.⁶⁵ In fact, everyone who defends a point of view or an opinion with respect to religion or a worldview is an *exclusivist*. That is for the simple reason that proposition P excludes proposition not-P. In that sense this study also defends *exclusivism*: the claim that Christians have received God's salvation in Christ excludes any claim that denies this, for example, the claim that Christians have not received salvation in Christ but that it is a projection, a product of the human being himself. The claim that God is the source of religious experience (P) excludes the claim that God is not the source of religious experience but only a matter of projection (not-P).

Exclusivism can also be viewed in such a way that certain beliefs, such as those of Christians and Muslims, exclude each other. If the term *exclusivism* is used in this way, then I reject that as dogmatism. Adherents of this form of *exclusivism* are not open to arguments against their own position. One believes that one possesses the whole truth and others not at all. It is not simply that a certain view or opinion is excluded but the other religion or worldview in its entirety. This can be misleadingly formulated in the following way. Religion A adheres to theory P and religion B to theory not-P. If P is true, then not-P is false. This form of *exclusivism* is one of the causes of religious wars and also of the terrorist acts of Muslim fundamentalists.

Exclusivism as the exclusion of other religions or worldviews is wrong for the following reason. The question is whether, for example, the Christian faith or Islam can be compared with adhering to either theory P or theory not-P. Then it obtains that if P is true, then not-P is false. It is better to compare both faiths with adhering to a theory P and a theory Q. Whether the argument 'if P is true, then Q is false' holds depends on how P and Q are related to each other.

I argued above that believing is not a matter of adhering to propositions but having a practice or form of life, a social symbolic system of signs, norms and rules. It is well known that Christians and Muslims share some beliefs with each other, such as that God called Abraham and that Jesus had a special relationship with God. They disagree on other points, such as with respect to Jesus' death on the cross. We cannot therefore say that the one faith excludes the other but only certain elements of the other faith. H.M. Vroom has noted correctly that the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ implies neither Christian absolutism nor *exclusivism*. This form of *exclusivism* maintains that if God has revealed himself in a special way to certain people, these people have the whole truth and others not at all.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 438-57; R. van Woudenberg, *Toewal en omverp in de wereld* [Chance and Design in the World], ch. 6.

⁶⁶ Vroom, *No Other Gods*, 140.

I have called this form of exclusivism dogmatism, because its proponents are not open to the fact that religious and worldview traditions like Christianity, Islam and humanism, in spite of mutual differences, do partially overlap. To arrive at this insight dialogue with one another is necessary.

Adherents of religions and worldviews formulate their proposals for the direction of life and assume its truth without demanding exclusivism for their own point of view in the sense of excluding one another's religion or worldview. Of course, this situation does not demand, as already stated, that people should no longer strive for truth. The point is to find the best possible reasons for one's own belief, in the process of which, undoubtedly, adjustment and correction will take place through what one learns in dialogue with those of another faith or worldview. One can also attempt to make one's own reason more universal in the sense of attempting to convince the other of the rightness of one's own belief. The following consideration coheres closely with the ultimate openness of the question of truth.

Consensus cannot be the goal, because plurality is given with the human condition. Consensus cannot be the goal of a dialogue on worldviews for the following reason. At the basis of beliefs are experiences. Our relationship with the world is a matter of interpreted experience, in which the person is involved with his world. Such experiences can occur in a context and be influenced by a relationship to Transcendence or the absence of such a relationship. For the Christian faith I have described this hermeneutical process of the human being as a story in the making and have shown how the person is refigured through the configuration of the Biblical story (ch. 4). The accounting for faith has, in addition to a rational aspect in that people are open to rebuttal, also an affective aspect that turns the religious experience into a personal experience. Experiences and the beliefs associated with them are always personal and thus pluralistic. Already within Catholicism and Protestantism there are different spiritual traditions. Pluralism obtains *a fortiori* where it concerns adherents of different religions and worldviews. If the goal cannot be consensus, that does not mean that people should not strive to settle differences in teachings between groups that are related to one another. To the contrary. In that respect the ecumenical discussion in the last century has made a great deal of progress.

In a dialogue with those of other beliefs not only is mutual understanding of and for each other's view possible but also mutual assessment, learning and critique. According to contextualism, a dialogue between different worldviews can, at the most, yield mutual understanding, but

assessment and critique are not possible. The reason for this is that there is only a practice-relative, internal rationality. Practices as a whole are difficult to subject to criticism.

Winch, who defends contextualism, holds that a cultural anthropologist from the West can certainly understand an oral culture in Africa. He shows how medicine men in the African Azande tribe can influence others in a mysterious way. But that influence should not be understood in terms of the Western concept of causality but in terms that do justice to the practice in question.⁶⁷ Thus, every practice has its own rules and thus its own rationality. According to contextualism, however, critique and assessment are not very possible, if one wants to avoid ethnocentrism, in assessing another culture through the lens of Western science.

Does that also hold for dialogue in one's own society? Adherents of different worldviews who live in Western society do not inhabit entirely different worlds but worlds that overlap, primarily in the public sphere. Therefore, the possibility of having a dialogue in Western society is better than in, for example, African countries where religions differ more sharply from one another. The pertinent question is whether assessment and critique is also possible. Contextualism holds, as stated, that in a dialogue only mutual understanding of and for one another is possible. My question is whether a dialogue with the exclusive goal of coming to mutual understanding of one another's worldview can still be called a *dialogue*, however important such understanding may be. In fact, one does not come any further than understanding what the position of the other is. But dialogue is aimed at coming to a deeper insight into the shared question of the direction of human life.

It is certainly true that one's own worldview colours reality. It does make a difference whether one sees the world as a Buddhist, as a Hindu or as a Christian. Either one believes that reality is essentially *nirvana* or one sees the world as emanating from the gods or one believes that this world is created by God and is moving towards recreation. The question here is how these differences are to be evaluated. Some contextualists say that the Buddhist, the Hindu and the Christian inhabit different worlds and express in their rituals, stories and behaviour their attitude toward the nontransparent world. We can view that differently and say that the worldviews make claims about what reality truly is. The faith of the Christian and that of the Hindu and the insight of the Buddhist are, in my view, more than simply the expression of an attitude towards the non-transparent world — they are also claims about what the world truly is.

⁶⁷ P. Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society,' 103.

There is not one single norm for all practices. There are different ones, depending on the practice in question. The one practice differs from the other. In order to judge whether a worldview is good for that which it is intended, however, one must develop norms. The guiding points already discussed can serve for this. They do not give a definitive decision about the question of religious truth but do give direction to the dialogue. These are the norms of 1) *theoretical suitability* in the giving of direction with respect to fundamental questions of life. How does a particular religion give insight into the question of why we are on earth? And that of 2) *existential suitability*: do they give guidance to life in such a way that they can make life good in the qualitative sense?

Norms of rationality are indeed dependent on a certain practice, which does not exclude some from *transcending their own practice*. Due to transversal rationality a dialogue between different worldviews involving mutual assessment, learning and critique is possible. Schragg points to three aspects of transversal rationality: critique, articulation and disclosure (§6.2.3). Applied to our topic I have made use of this in the following way: As an example of 'articulation' I used the argument of religious experience as the way in which the believer gave reasons for his faith. He claims to say something about what reality truly is ('disclosure'). The 'critique' in the dialogue with those of other beliefs and worldviews consists in judging, learning and critiquing. I supplemented these three aspects of transversal rationality with the requirement of coherence and the avoidance of contradictions and the principle of presumption. Thus, universality (principles that go beyond the practice and are valid for everyone) and the particularity of the different worldviews (the practice-dependent norms and aims) are reconciled with each other.

In short, people from different worldviews or religions can pose critical questions to one another about their views of life and faith. A mutual rational accounting of worldviews and religions is possible.

Looking at Gauguin's painting 'The Vision After the Sermon' one can wonder whether the question of whether their faith was rational occupied the Breton women. The question of the rationality of faith is not a final question but one that we need to ask ourselves as the situation requires. The closed society of nineteenth-century Brittany is no longer ours. For many in our society faith is no longer an obvious matter. Now that supports that the Breton women could find in their world have disappeared from ours, we are thrown back upon our experience.

The eighteenth-century man of letters G.E. Lessing spoke about experience as the evidence of 'spirit and power.' The believer assents to the

Christian faith because he has felt the shock of the electric spark. With this, Lessing, like Tillich, appeals to faith being self-evident. In this study experience has also been used as evidence of 'spirit and power,' in which it was not, as in Lessing and Tillich, concerned with self-authenticating experience but an experience about which there can be discussion.

Experience and rationality share the fact that people have so often thought about them in such elevated and profound ways that they no longer seem to belong to the world of everyday. With respect to experience people often think of special mystical experiences of which they have only heard. And rationality should be primarily a matter of science and not of religion. Thus religious experience and rationality fall outside the reach of many, with the consequence of scepticism with respect to believing. Does the sceptic not resemble, according to Locke, someone 'who would not use his legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no wings to fly?'⁶⁸ If there is one thing that is clear after reading this book it is that experience and rationality are part and parcel of everyday life and are not too high or too deep.

⁶⁸ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction, 5.

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INDEX OF SUBJECTS

- accounting for faith
 argument on the basis of religious experience, 220-239
 assent to a testimony, 159, 160, 177, 186, 191-200
 challenges to faith, 1-3, 9, 10, 42, 43, 57, 58, 239-247
 classical apologetics, 3-9, 23, 39, 50, 61, 90, 201
 criteria, 72-77, 206-208, 219, 241, 242, 244-247
 deontological (normative), 12, 60, 61
 epistemological, 47-81, 85, 202
 first and third person, 61, 62, 226
 evaluative, 60, 61
 hermeneutical-phenomenological, 9, 10, 85-247
 immunisation of faith, 38, 41, 42, 47, 78, 199, 208
 logical validity and persuasive power, 7, 79, 81, 194-196
 public accounting for faith, 240-247
 reason(s), 51, 71, 72, 75, 81, 82, 89, 90, 160, 163-165, 199, 200, 209-213, 220-227, 239, 240, 242
 rebuttal/refutation, 56, 57, 197, 198, 226-239
 transcendental, 10, 11, 23, 25-37, 47, 85, 201, 202
 see also, rationality; faith and history
 affectivity, theory of, 80, 163-200
 layered, 166, 179-191, 193, 194
 see also emotion; accounting for faith; religious experience
 apologetics, 10, 228
 see also accounting for faith
- assent to a testimony
 see accounting for faith
- contextualism, 50, 62, 72-76, 130, 160, 203-213, 244, 245
 cumulative argument, 52, 58-62, 77, 221
- emotion, religious emotion, 109, 110, 166-179, 181-184
- epistemology
 see rationality
 evidentialism
 see rationality
 experience
 see religious experience
 explanation, 64, 65, 68, 69, 74, 144-159, 198, 227-239
 exclusivism, 2, 241-244
- faith
 attitude of, 89, 154-160, 186-191, 196-200
 content of, 90, 91, 124, 144-154
 definition of, 15, 99, 100
 and history, 37-42, 46, 90, 103, 104, 198, 220, 238, 239
 see also historical criticism
 testimony to Transcendence, 62, 85, 86, 102-109, 113, 114
 foundationalism (classical), 3-9, 12, 25, 36-42, 44-46, 54, 55, 73, 81, 112, 113, 161, 212, 214, 216, 220
- God (relationship with), 91-107, 118-123, 204-208
- heart, 100, 113, 184, 185, 187
 hermeneutics, 80, 81

INDEX OF SUBJECTS

262

see also accounting for faith
(hermeneutical-phenomenological)

historical criticism, 38-42, 46, 53, 54,
129, 130, 146, 198, 238, 239

see also faith and history

history
see faith and history

identity, 112, 124, 125, 135, 150-154,
158, 159

immunisation of faith

see accounting for faith

judgement
see rationality

language game
see practice

mood, 100, 109, 110, 115, 116, 178-
181, 186-191

mysticism as a category

myth, 143, 144

narrative

biblical, 90, 104, 142-144, 238,
239

definition, 138

fiction, 141

historical narrative, 140

and rationality, 144-154, 160-162
and time, 136-144, 148-150,
161, 162

see also religious experience:

narrative aspects

narrative identity

see identity

narrative theology, 124-162, 204-
208

paradox, 122

phenomenology, 10, 70, 87, 88, 97-
99, 119-123, 186

practice, 50, 56, 57, 62, 72-76, 212

presumptionism

see rationality

rationality, 11-13, 70-72, 90, 214-
220, 247

and affectivity, 105, 106, 191-200

criteria see accounting for faith

evidentialism, 71, 75, 89, 113

formal, 4, 8, 70, 71, 113 see also

foundationalism (classical)

judgement, 113, 114, 185, 196, 220

practice-relative 70-77, 206-208,
211-213

practice-oriented, 4, 12, 46, 62, 70-
72, 82, 113, 124, 154, 160-162,
186, 203

presumptionism, 71, 72, 81, 89,
192, 199, 219, 241, 246

and religious experience, 93-102,
118-123, 220-237

principle of credibility, 55, 56, 72,
76, 78

principle of proportionality, 108,
163, 191-193

and truth, 78, 81, 203, 242

transversal (rationality), 76, 216-
220, 246

universal (rationality) see transversal

(rationality)

reader, 148, 154-159

realism, 76, 77

reasonableness

see rationality

reason(s)

see accounting for faith

rebuttal/refutation

see accounting for faith

religious experience, 2, 3, 9, 13-18,
24, 25, 47, 48, 85, 86, 87, 247

aspects, 89, 109-114

affective-cognitive, 109, 110,
180-186, 186-191

INDEX OF SUBJECTS

263

(social) evidentialism

see rationality

transcendence

vertical/horizontal, 96

trans-intentionality

see religious experience

time

see religious experience; narrative

truth

see rationality

witness, 86, 88, 106-109, 113, 159,
160

see also faith as testimony to
Transcendence; accounting for
faith

worldview apriori, 115-118

narrative, 80, 104, 110-112, 125-
136, 154-160

trans-intentional, 99-102, 118-
123, 170, 176, 177, 188-191, 227

authority of experience, 61, 62,
201, 239

definition, 15, 16, 29, 30, 113, 114

hermeneutical, 88, 110-112, 218

implicit and explicit, 26-30, 35, 36,
43, 45

momentary (immediate) and

lasting, 16-18, 48, 51-53, 62, 79,
82, 86, 91, 100, 114

self-contradictory concept?, 93-102

and understanding, 49, 63-70

time, 90, 111, 112, 131-136

saturated phenomenon, 119-123, 226,
227

INDEX OF NAMES

- Adrianse, H.J., 31
Albert, H., 46
Albertz, R., 238
Alston, W.P., 11, 18, 19, 47-81, 90,
110, 160, 171, 198, 202, 212, 240,
242
Alter, R., 145
Anselm of Canterbury, 2, 3
Arendt, H., 158
Aristotle, 13, 17, 93, 117, 122, 137,
138, 141, 171, 172, 182
Audi, R., 241
Auerbach, E., 129, 131
Augustine, 111, 139, 184, 190, 195

Bacon, F., 14
Bager, M.C., 78, 79
Barth, K., 72, 75
Barnard, W., 190
Berendsen, D., 24
Bloch, E., 190

Bollnow, O.F., 109, 178, 181
Bodin, J., 228
Brinkman, M.E., 28
Broad, C.D., 7
Brown, H.I., 8, 71, 75, 113
Brueggemann, W., 85, 86, 104
Buber, M., 105
Bultmann, R., 36

Calvin, J., 55
Cart, D., 126, 128, 131-136, 139
Cézanne, P., 183
Clayton, J.P., 41
Cook, M.J., 142, 143, 145
Crites, S., 111, 128, 132
Cusveller, B., 8, 45
Cuppitt, D., 127, 128

Danto, A.C., 130
De Boer, T., 9, 141, 154
Derrida, J., 223
Descartes, R., 5, 15, 54, 95, 113, 167,
217
De Sousa, R., 172-174
Dierse, U. and Kuhlen, R., 34
Dionysius the Areopagite, 27
Dostoyevsky, F., 175
Duinjter, O., 184
Durkheim, E., 79, 197, 234

Ebeling, G., 3
Edwards, J., 164, 193, 194
Eliade, M., 10, 143, 237
Emmel, H., 184
Enomiyas-Lasalle, H.M., 18
Evans-Pritchard, E.E., 237
Evdokimov, P., 80

Feuerbach, A., 235
Forman, R.K.C., 67
Fortmann, H.M.M., 235-237
Franks Davis, C., 7
Frazer, J., 79, 197, 228
Frei, H.W., 72, 75, 128-131, 151, 239
Freud, S., 79, 172, 188, 197, 228-232
Gadamer, H.-G., 17, 85, 93, 112, 122,
210
Gauguin, P., 1, 9, 16, 17, 42, 53, 78,
86, 240, 246
Geertz, C., 237
Genette, G., 138
Goldberg, M., 207, 208
Goldie, P., 175
Greenspan, P.S., 174, 175
Grube, D.-M., 45
Guattari, F., 217
Gutting, G., 7, 220

Habermas, J., 217
Hegel, G., 17, 103, 135
Heidegger, M., 10, 12, 69, 88, 93, 94,
98, 110, 115-117, 135, 139, 178,
181
Heiler, F., 67
Hengel, M., 238, 239
Heron, J., 179
Heschel, A.J., 104
Hettner, T.L., 159
Hick, J., 16-18
Homer, 129
Homer, R., 92, 95
Houtepen, A., 1
Hume, D., 6, 54, 166-169, 170, 178
Husserl, E., 10, 15, 88, 95, 97, 98,
119, 120, 132, 139, 217

Ignatius of Loyola, 18
Irving, J., 144
Iser, W., 138, 155

Jacob, 61, 62
James, W., 17, 47, 48, 51, 93, 164-
166, 168-170, 173, 178, 193, 196
Jansen, H., 144
Janssen, P., 88
Järveläinen, P., 175, 176
Jesus, 147-158, 197, 205, 206, 221
John of the Cross, 34, 63

Kambartel, F., 13
Kant, I., 31, 32, 36, 38, 46, 50, 68,
103, 119, 135, 162, 197, 198, 217
Katz, S.T., 63, 67
Kähler, M., 41
Keamy, R., 137
Kenny, A., 173, 174
Kemnade, F., 126, 127, 138, 145
Kierkegaard, S., 135, 164
Kort, W.A., 128, 132, 138
Kuhn, T.S., 9, 12, 98, 99, 192
Kuiper, E.J., 160

Kuipers, R.A., 241
Kuitert, H.M., 130
Kurtz, P., 45

Lash, N., 17
Lessing, G.E., 39, 41, 53, 54, 103,
129, 161, 247
Levinas, E., 88, 91-97, 98, 109, 119,
190
Lindbeck, G.A., 72, 128
Locke, J., 3, 4-6, 71, 163, 178, 201,
247
Loughlin, G., 128-131

Maas, F., 14
MacIntyre, A., 128, 132, 214-216
Malcolm, N., 72, 211, 212
Mark, 137, 138, 142-160
Maret, R.R., 79
Marion, J.-L., 119-123
Marx, K., 79, 135, 197, 232-234, 237
Matthew, 204-208
Merleau-Ponty, M., 88, 98, 136, 181
Mink, L.O., 125
Mitchell, B., 7, 77
Murdoch, I., 144
Murphy, N.C., 221

Newman, J.H., 7, 61, 163, 164, 175,
195
Nietzsche, F., 2, 45, 46, 228

Oberhammer, G., 11, 24
Otto, R., 67, 94, 95, 119, 176
Pals, D.L., 234
Pannenberg, W., 184
Pascal, B., 110, 164, 185, 198
Paul, 184, 195, 213, 242
Pellauer, D., 134
Perrin, N., 146
Pesch, R., 147, 238
Petersen, N.R., 147
Philipse, H., 198, 229, 234

Phillips, D.Z., 72, 73, 211

Plaicher, W.C., 72

Plantinga, A., 8, 44, 45, 49, 51, 107, 243

Plate, 135, 174

Port, H., 171, 178

Proudfoot, W., 63-66, 68, 198, 227, 228

Rahner, K., 11, 24

Ramsey, L., 102

Reid, T., 55, 56

Recher, N., 12

Resegnie, J.L., 155

Ricoeur, P., 10, 85, 88, 98, 102, 105, 107, 135-142, 146, 147, 151, 154, 158, 159, 162, 178, 181, 183, 199

Riessen, R.D.N., 92

Runza, J., 70

Sartre, J.P., 216, 217

Schachter, S., 63

Schaeffler, R., 11, 32

Scheier, M., 179

Schelling, F.W.J., 34, 46

Schillebeeckx, E., 125

Schliermacher, F.D.E., 11, 23, 32, 33, 38, 50, 69, 93, 99-102, 104, 184, 186-191, 198

Schmithals, W., 238

Schneiders, S.M., 134, 138

Scholes, R. and Kellogg, R., 138

Schragg, C.O., 88, 216-219, 246

Schüssler, W., 43

Schultz, G., 116

Schumann, J.D., 41

Smart, N., 16, 67

Slace, W.T., 67

Slemmark, M., 4, 71, 77, 191, 214, 215, 219

Stoker, W., 5, 6, 34, 39, 45, 67, 89, 119, 136, 143, 189, 219, 239

Strasser, S., 109, 165, 166, 179-182, 184

Swinburne, R., 7

Tannehill, R.C., 156

Taylor, C., 117

Taylor, E.B., 79, 228

Taylor, M.C., 128

Taylor, V., 145, 147

Teresa of Avila, 30

Thiemann, R.F., 72, 128, 131, 204, 208, 210

Thomas Aquinas, 4, 44

Tillich, P., 11, 15, 23-46, 47, 53, 78, 90, 93, 94, 95, 103, 111, 112, 114, 117, 153, 161, 177, 184, 198, 201, 202, 204, 220, 238

Toland, J., 13

Toulmin, S.E., 3, 220, 224

Tracy, D., 241

Trigg, R., 75, 213

Underhill, E., 67

Van den Brink, G., 45

Van den Brom, L.J., 77

Van Huyssteen, J.W., 12, 201, 217, 218, 239

Van Iersel, B.M.F., 145, 146, 150

Van der Kooi, C., 99

Van der Leeuw, G., 10

Van Olst, E.H., 14, 15

Van Oyen, G., 158

Van Saane, J.W., 179, 190, 191

Van Woudenberg, R., 45, 69, 243

Vos, J.S., 238

Vroom, H.M., 209, 211, 219, 243

Waayman, K., 14

Wainwright, W.J., 193, 194

Welten, R., 95

Weren, W., 138

White, H., 127

Wiesel, E., 141

Winch, P., 72, 74, 210, 231, 245

Witgenstein, L., 12, 50, 62, 70, 72-74, 210

Wolff, H.W., 184

Wallerstorff, N., 4, 49, 105, 163, 241

Woolf, V., 141

Wright, G.H., 154

Yandell, K.E., 7

Zachner, R.C., 67

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